

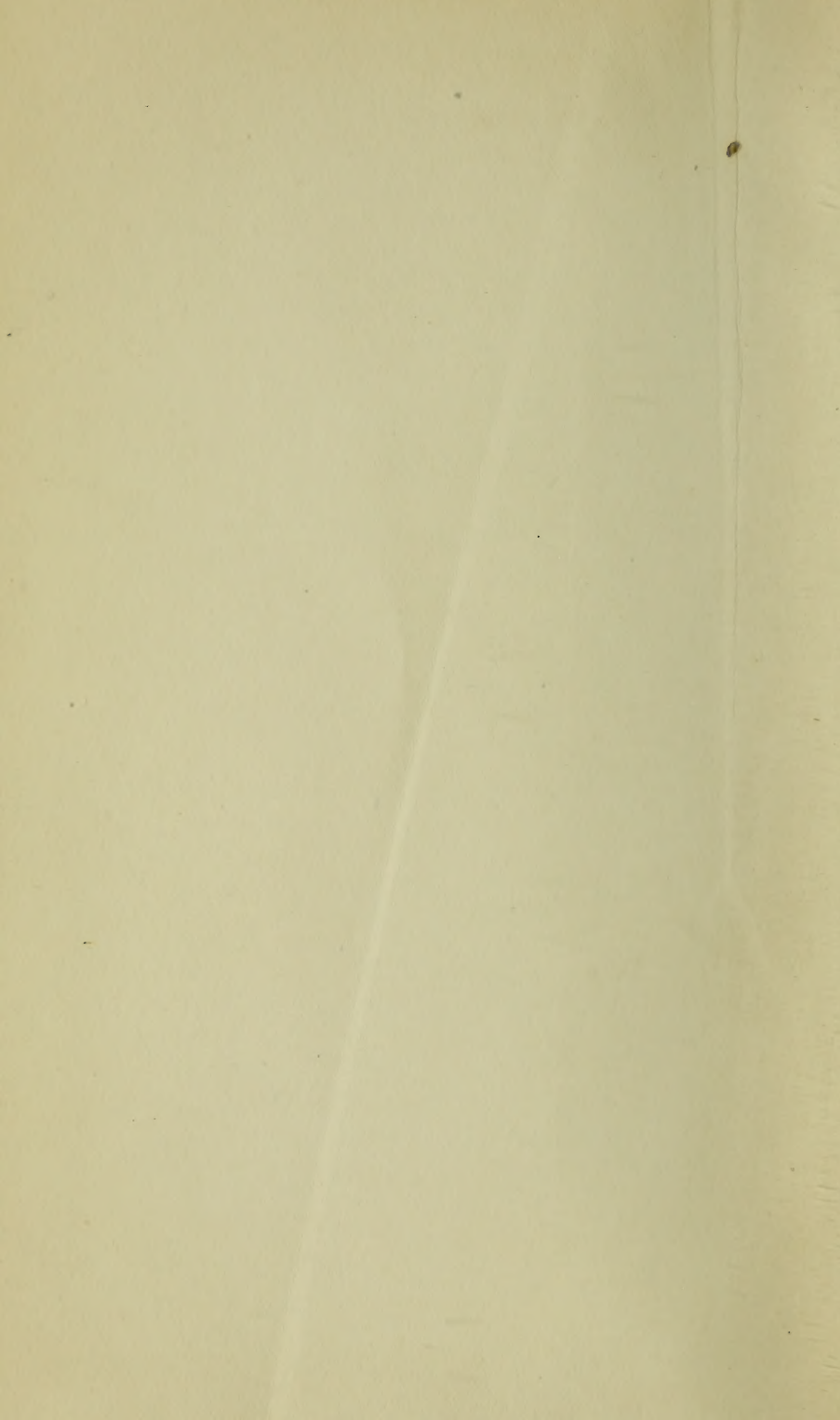
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MOLTKE



*MAKERS · OF · THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY*

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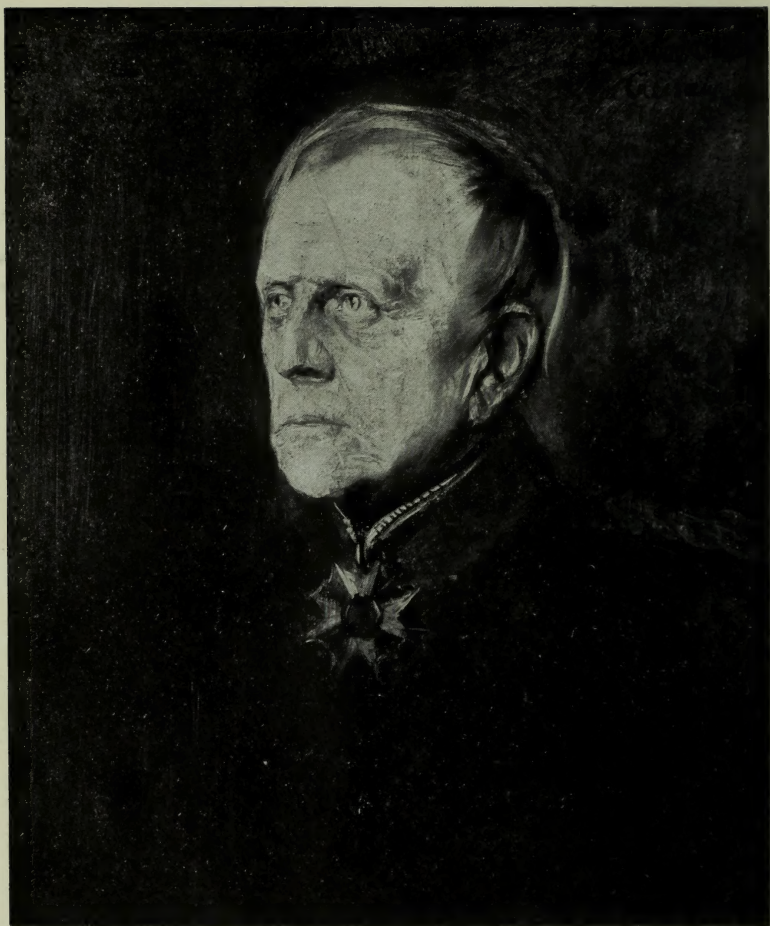
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MOLTKE.

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MAKERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Edited by BASIL WILLIAMS

# MOLTKE

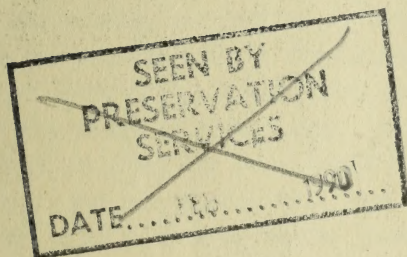
BY

LIEUT.-COLONEL F. E. WHITTON, C.M.G.

AUTHOR OF

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

“DER GROSSE SCHWEIGER”—such was the name by which their great organizer of victory was affectionately known to the German people, and, silent as he was through life, so in a large measure he has remained in history, in spite of the reams of memoirs and histories and critical accounts of campaigns that have been written round about this enigmatical figure. Herein was the secret of his greatness, and herein the extraordinary fitness of Moltke to appear as the archetype of that wonderful German army, that in 1864, in 1866, and finally in 1870 gave the Germans back that full consciousness of national life, almost lost in the long centuries of disorganization and disunion;—in this silent unassuming certainty of the great Chief of the Staff. People are wont to talk of the strong silent man who does the chief work of the world; but the strong silent man is one of the rarest of phenomena. Nearly all the men who have had an effect on their world have been so bubbling over with life and energy that they talk even more than they act, and find their power largely in the contagious influence of their enthusiasm which carries their contemporaries along with them. Moltke was one of the very rare exceptions, a man who really achieved great things without any apparent magnetic force. He never led his soldiers in battle like a Caesar, a Marlborough, a Napoleon, a Wellington: he never earned their affection or at least their respect by the memory of dangers and hardships shared in common and of victories won side by side; no

tales have been handed down of words of inspiration that he spoke to confirm the doubting or arouse the torpid. All his work was done silently and, as far as we can judge, almost alone. And yet he had that supreme gift of inspiring confidence. The fact was that he exactly fitted in with the spirit of his people at that time. The revival from the national humiliation of Jena, which lasted with brief intermissions till the triumph of 1870, was a time of quiet unselfish devotion to public objects in Germany. The people of the Germany of those days were working for an idea, for the idea of German nationality, and they took it for granted that their leaders were working for the same unselfish end. They required no speeches to arouse them, they expected the quiet work of the thinker, whether he was student or soldier, to be devoted to the common cause. It was not necessary for Moltke to speak about shining armour : it was his job to be polishing it ; and it was assumed without his mentioning it that he was quietly doing his job.

Colonel Whitton has not made the *grosse Schweiger* talk : it would have taxed the eloquence of Carlyle himself, the great prophet of silence, to do that ; but he has succeeded in giving an impression of the man's silent strength, of his methods of work, of the way his victories were won, and what was their significance in military history. He has also, as far as it is possible, given us some of those rare touches, without which a man remains a phenomenon and not a human being on the printed page, of his home life and of the few occasions when he let himself go and showed something of his real self. Even so his human side can never become deeply interesting ; he is important chiefly as the supreme example of that spirit of self-effacing public service which animated all that was best in the German people during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

BASIL WILLIAMS.

February 18, 1921.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

MY best thanks are due to Major-General W. D. Bird, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., A.D.C., and to Captain W. E. Garrett Fisher, M.C., who have read through this book while in the press and given me the benefit of their advice on many points; but, while I have profited much from the suggestions of these generous helpers, they are not responsible for the judgments or statements in the pages they have kindly read.

For permission to reproduce the maps of 1866 (from *Bohemia, 1866*) and of the Franco-German War (from *The Development of the European Nations*) I am indebted to Major-General Neill Malcolm, C.B., D.S.O., and Dr. J. Holland Rose respectively. To make the former maps harmonize with the present text a few additional place-names are required. These it was not possible to insert without damage to the blocks from which the maps are reproduced; but the places can be located with sufficient accuracy by reference to the footnote below.<sup>1</sup>

F. E. W.

March 1921.

<sup>1</sup> Sternberg, immediately north of the "a" of Littau. Map 1.  
Reichenau, 10 miles S.S.E. of Opočno. Map 2.  
Prelautsch, 10 miles W. of Pardubitz. Map 2.  
Chlumetz, 1 mile S.W. of junction of Rivers Bistritz and Jaworka. Map 2.  
Kamenitz, 9 miles W. of Miletin. Map 2.





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5. Woerth.
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<sup>1</sup> See footnote to Author's Preface.



## CHAPTER I

### PRUSSIA AT THE TIME OF MOLTKE'S BIRTH

HELMUTH CARL BERNHARD VON MOLTKE was born in 1800, and in his long life of ninety-one years was to witness Prussia's downfall, regeneration, and ultimate triumph. Though his span of life bridged the era so full of development for Germany the brilliance of his own achievement as a Maker of the Nineteenth Century is contained within a period of less than sixty months. But the biography of the man would be poor and incomplete were it constricted by such limit, and confined merely to the recital of the campaigns with which his name is ever linked.

The triumphs of 1866 and 1870 were by no means the sudden success of the man brought forth by the hour. On the contrary they were the coping-stone to a career of close professional study, where the secrets of military science garnered by the thinker and student—the "library rat," or *Der grosse Schweiger*, as men called him—were put to brilliant use. Again, the first, and possibly the greatest triumph of Moltke, that of 1866, is an instance where strategy was so embedded in politics that its fine points and facets cannot be rightly appreciated unless it be superimposed on its proper background, the long rivalry between Austria and Prussia. In the third place the instrument which Moltke used with such effect—the Prussian Army—had gone through remarkable changes. From the finest army in Europe it had fallen to the lowest depths, to rise again to triumph. Before the wars of 1866 and 1870, therefore, can be properly understood, there are three things to be described: the downfall and regeneration of Prussia, as a military power; the

internal political struggle in Germany ; and the making of Moltke as the strategist and the man.

The storm which had burst over Europe with the French Revolution died away for a moment in 1802, and the signing of the Peace of Amiens on the 27th of March gave Europe a brief breathing space in the chaos of the Revolutionary Wars. Only two of the contestants were now left in the arena ; but there was both in France and England a general desire for peace, and there was indeed no special reason for continuing the war. But though the struggle had diminished to a duel between the two strongest Great Powers it had been in every sense a world-wide war. Each of the five continents of the globe had been either threatened or definitely affected. Europe had been a veritable cockpit. In Asia there had been two great battles in India, while Ceylon and Malacca had been wrested by England from the Dutch, and Syria had seen hard fighting in 1799. In Africa, Holland had lost the Cape ; and, in Egypt, the battles of the Pyramids, Aboukir, and Alexandria had been fought and won. In the Western Hemisphere fighting in San Domingo had been bitter and severe ; several islands in the West Indies had fallen to the British ; and the efforts of French negotiators to recover Louisiana had led to words of ominous import from President Jefferson in 1801. The menace of war had even reached Australia, for Bonaparte had planned an expedition to that continent in order to establish French settlements in a country which was largely claimed by England.

In this world war which marked the closing years of the eighteenth century, Prussia, like the majority of European Powers, had been engaged ; but it was by no means her first experience of a struggle of so wide a range. The Seven Years' War, in which Prussia had been perhaps the outstanding figure, had meant desperate fighting in three-quarters of the globe, and earlier still, the War of the Austrian Succession, due entirely to the rapacity of Frederick the Great, involved four Great Powers, while its scope extended from the St. Lawrence to the Bay of Bengal. As Macaulay well said, " on the head of Frederick is all the blood which was shed in a war which raged for many years, and in every quarter of the globe, the blood of the column of Fontenoy, the blood of



the mountaineers of Culloden. The evil produced by his wickedness was felt in lands where the name of Prussia was unknown ; and in order that he might rob a neighbour whom he had promised to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."

But whatever iniquity attaches to Prussia for her eighteenth-century wars—and they included three robberies of Poland—they were relieved in part by the dazzling glory of the military efforts of Frederick the Great. Far otherwise was it with Prussia's share in the Revolutionary wars which broke out in 1792. In that contest she played indeed a sorry part. The rapidity and decision of Frederician warfare had given place to half-heartedness and almost incredible slowness. On September 2nd, with the surrender of Verdun, the road to Paris seemed open. But on the misty morning of the 20th, Kellerman, with his ill trained and disciplined troops—stiffened, luckily for him, by good artillery and old troops of the line—faced the Prussian troops at Valmy, and an artillery combat began. With that, however, the battle ended. The Prussian columns formed up for attack, never advanced, and scarcely fired a shot. The losses were a mere handful. And then, discouraged, annoyed by the failure of the Austrians to co-operate, with its administrative services completely broken down, and its ranks thinned by sickness, the Prussian army fell back. By October 23rd it was over the frontier. Such was the rôle played by the inheritors of the glories of the Seven Years' War in one of the decisive battles of the world.

There was little indeed that was heroic in the attitude of Prussia from the battle of Valmy to the Treaty of Basel, and the ten years which followed were among the most inglorious in her history. In 1798, when the Great Powers banded themselves in the Second Coalition against Bonaparte, one Power stood aloof. That Power was Prussia, and no argument could drag her from her inglorious neutrality or persuade her to forsake her course of short-sighted selfishness. Prussia had indeed sunk to a depth of military impotence almost incredible to those who could remember the prestige which was hers less than half a century before.

Still, even in her darkest hour she was to find a Scharnhorst, a Gneisenau, and a Stein ; and, greater than these, in his cradle was an infant destined in old age to place her in her former position, and as a soldier to claim to be regarded as a fit successor to the Great Frederick himself.

## CHAPTER II

### MOLTKE'S CHILDHOOD—THE DOWNFALL OF PRUSSIA

LIKE Blücher, Moltke was a Mecklenburger by birth. He came of a German family of old nobility, and as early as the year 1246 there is to be found in the records of the Bishopric of Schwerin the name of Matheus Moltke as one of the knights. Not much later there are records of Moltkes in Sweden and again in Denmark who held high office in church and state. The male line of all these Swedish and Danish branches died out between 1440 and 1550, although there are to-day Danish Moltkes sprung from the original German stock. The father of Helmuth von Moltke entered the Prussian Service and married in 1797 Sophie Henrietta Paschen, the daughter of a well-to-do Lübeck merchant. Before his marriage the elder von Moltke had retired from the service as a lieutenant, after thirteen very happy years spent within it. He was possessed of but small means, being one of a family of thirteen, and seems to have been of a somewhat unpractical nature. Determined to try his hand at gentleman farming, he purchased the fee-farm of Lieben-thal near Wittstock and went there immediately after his wedding. There two sons were born to him. In 1800 he sold Lieben-thal and moved to Parchim, a town in Mecklen-burg-Schwerin, where his brother Helmuth was the military commander. In the same year a third son was born and was given the name of Helmuth from the father's brother. Two more sons followed in 1805, and in that year the father purchased the estate of Augustenhof in Holstein of which the owner, by law, was required to be or to become a Danish subject. The house upon the estate was in sore need of reconstruction, and while the necessary operations were being

carried out the mother and children continued to live at Lübeck, only visiting Augustenhof from time to time. The requisite formalities had already been put in hand, and on June 13, 1806, the father received the certificate of nationalization for himself and his descendants. About the same time he was made a major in the Danish Landwehr, and, as Denmark was then at war with England, extra battalions were raised as quickly as possible. The 3rd supplementary line battalion of the Holstein regiment, of which the elder Moltke became commander in 1807, was organized entirely by himself.

His wife was a woman of great force of character, mistress of several languages, and extremely fond of music, qualities which she transmitted to her famous son. Unhappily, the married life of the parents was marred by incompatibility of character; after a few years, misfortune, loss of money, and anxiety began, and the tie which linked husband and wife proved too fragile to stand the strain. Gradually they drifted from one another and eventually lived apart, but this unhappy circumstance seems to have strengthened the affection between the mother and her son.

The earliest recollections of the young Helmuth von Moltke were associated with the military annihilation of the country he was later to serve with such distinction. Frederick William, in spite of his selfish policy of neutrality, was at length forced to take part in the European struggle, and at a moment greatly disadvantageous to his country. Bonaparte's policy after the Treaty of Basel was to reconstruct Germany in the interest of France and to keep Prussia quiet by a mixture of cajolery, intimidation, and indemnities. There was, however, in Frederick William's composition a streak of patriotic pride, and an infringement, which seems to have been deliberate, of Prussian neutrality—brought about by the passage of a French corps through Prussian territory on its way to the Austrian campaign of 1805—was like a match to powder. It woke in Frederick William, and indeed in all Prussia, an explosion of furious wrath. Prussia began to arm; a convention was signed with Russia; and an ultimatum was despatched to the French Emperor. The disaster which attended the Russian and Austrian



armies altered, however, the whole position, and absolved Prussia from her obligations to the Tsar; and in order to compel her to exchange her neutrality for a state of war with England, Napoleon now forced on Prussia the long-coveted but exceedingly embarrassing gift of Hanover.

The Prussian ministry proposed to hold King George III.'s property on deposit, so to speak, but in 1806 a half-forgotten battle fought in southern Italy forced Prussia to her doom. The British victory at Maida imperilled the stability of Joseph Bonaparte's new kingdom of Naples, and in August Napoleon offered to return King George III. his own property of Hanover, if the British would withdraw from Sicily. The insult was more than Frederick William could endure. He was stung into action, and on October 1st war was declared. The conditions, however, were all in Napoleon's favour. Including 20,000 troops contributed by Saxony, the Duke of Brunswick and Prince Hohenlohe found themselves in command of but 140,000 men concentrated near Jena on the Saale. Napoleon had meanwhile assembled a great army 200,000 strong on the upper Main. Such was the military situation which was faced with a complacent light-heartedness by the Prussian Government.

Into the actual fighting it is not necessary to go in detail. The Prussian force was divided; Napoleon's army was admirably concentrated; and the Prussian leaders had no real plan. A preliminary encounter on October 10th ended disastrously for the Prussians and four days later the decisive blow fell. On the 14th, in the twin battles of Jena and Auerstädt, the field army of Prussia was almost annihilated. A great strategic pursuit then began. Davoust occupied Berlin eleven days after the battle of Jena, and on the 26th October, the sixth birthday of Helmuth von Moltke, Napoleon was at its gates. The pursuing columns went as far north as Stettin, and ranged wide to Lübeck in the north-west. The rapidity with which the pursuit was conducted came as a revelation to the slow-going militarists of Prussia, but it was rendered possible only by the shameful surrender of Prussian fortresses. Strongly garrisoned though they were, seven large places capitulated, four of them on the mere appearance of the enemy. The capitulations were as

disgraceful as they were inexplicable. Well might Alison cry, "Where were the soldiers of the Great Frederick, where the constancy of the Seven Years' War when Magdeburg, Stettin, Cüstrin, and Glogau lowered their colours without firing a shot?" By the middle of November, 1806, the whole of Prussia west of the Vistula, with the exception of Silesia, was in the hands of Napoleon. The impression produced on Europe was profound and Heine's words but gave voice to it: "*L'Empereur n'avait eu qu'à siffler et la Prusse n'existait plus.*" The strategic pursuit by the French was one of the greatest known in history, and years later Moltke, in referring to the rare occasions on which such operations have taken place, gave as his opinion: "To carry through a pursuit after heavy fighting a man must have a powerful and relentless will such as Napoleon possessed."

Moltke, indeed, had himself witnessed the result of speed in war as typified by French troops. It will be remembered that while the elder Moltke was engaged in repairing his newly bought house at Augustenhof, his family continued to live at Lübeck hard by the Danish frontier. This was one of the old German free cities and claimed to be neutral, but Blücher in his retreat from Jena disregarded the claim and made ready to defend the place. The next day—November 7th—three French columns attacked the town with 60,000 men and severe fighting took place in the streets. From street to street, from church to church, and house to house, the conflict continued. The house of the Moltkes was plundered by the invaders. Blücher himself repeatedly charged at the head of a body of cavalry, but was unable to drive out the French soldiers, and at last, after 8000 Prussians had become casualties, hemmed in between the Danish frontier and the sea, he had to surrender with 4000 infantry, 3700 horse, and 40 guns. Thus perished the last fragment of the field armies of Prussia, and in such circumstances had Moltke his first experience of war and of "the hereditary foe, the eternal, tireless, destructive enemy"—France.

## CHAPTER III

### CAUSES OF THE PRUSSIAN DISASTERS IN 1806

THE news of Jena came as a thunderbolt to Europe, which had hardly recovered from the shock arising from the fall of Austria in three months, and had now to witness Prussia overthrown in as many weeks. The fabric reared with so much care and wisdom by Frederick the Great had fallen at a single blow. Three hundred and fifty standards, 4000 pieces of cannon, 7 first-rate fortresses, and 80,000 prisoners had been taken, and these results, unprecedented in the Europe of the day, had been achieved over the first military power of Europe. Prussia had been beaten to her knees, and in a few hours Napoleon had done what the combined might of Austria, Russia, and France had failed to accomplish in the Seven Years' War.

There was not a household in Prussia where the subject of the disastrous result of a campaign, which had been entered upon with such confidence and enthusiasm, was not discussed with earnest argument. Scharnhorst, who had been soon exchanged for a French colonel, could not refrain from expressing his thoughts while on his long journey to join the king at Königsberg. Writing from Rostock on November 22 to his daughter, he says :

When Schmidt is sleeping by me in the carriage I have the miserable liberty of giving myself up entirely to the outbreak of grief. Now are the bravest most sad and afflicted, and the most spiritless most cheerful and contented. . . . It comes home to me doubly, as I know all the blunders, the stupidity, the cowardice that have brought us to the present pass.

In the Moltkes' Danish residence there was doubtless many an outburst in the same strain. The eider von



Moltke had served in the Prussian army, as had all his brothers who had lived to manhood, and, as a man of strong opinions and given to a forcible expression of them, he was not likely to have remained silent about the disaster to Prussia, a disaster which had been brought home to him by the danger to his wife and children. Young Helmuth von Moltke must have heard again and again the bitter reproaches of the old Prussian officer, and the impression made upon him, child as he was, must have been deep. It is certain that in his maturer years he pondered deeply over the sudden collapse of Prussia, and that his long, silent, laborious efforts to place her army in an unassailable position were based largely on the study of the causes which had brought about her downfall.

As late as 1790 Prussia had stood for military efficiency and success, and even in the year of Jena and Auerstädt her army was brave and highly disciplined. But though outwardly the army was still the same and the discipline remained, the drill had gone wooden—so wooden that some of the non-commissioned officers carried astrolabes on their pikes to ensure correct direction in an advance across the parade-ground—and efficiency had declined. The prophetic soul of Scharnhorst anticipated the evil fate in store for the Prussian army in a letter to his son dated December 19, 1805 :

“ You will not,” he says, “ serve the French, and the other armies are for the most part in such a condition that little honour for the future is to be gained from them. As for the Prussian Army it is animated by the best spirit ; courage and ability—nothing is wanting. But it will not and cannot, in the condition in which it now is, or into which it will come, do anything great or decisive. This is my confession which I would not make to a lad in writing had I not in my mind my dearly loved son whom I would gladly guide in his course of life.”

The Prussian army had indeed many faults. It was an old army—an incredibly old army. Of 142 generals, 4 were over eighty and 13 had passed their seventieth year. In the infantry there were 540 higher officers, and of these over a quarter were more than sixty years old, while the cavalry had 25 senior officers, so senior that they were well



on to seventy. In the lower grades the situation was equally remarkable. Of 945 infantry captains, 119 were over fifty, 18 had passed sixty, and there were even two company commanders well on in their seventies. Clausewitz calculated that 21 generals who surrendered at Magdeburg could total up one thousand three hundred years between them. In one regiment the combined age of the three senior officers amounted to over two centuries and a half, while a company commander of the same unit was well over sixty. The record for senility, however, belonged to the garrison artillery, which possessed a major of seventy-seven. This was the army which light-heartedly opposed tireless Frenchmen commanded by a genius of thirty-seven, the army one general of which was capable of saying on parade at Potsdam, "His Majesty's army can produce *several* generals equal to M. de Bonaparte."

At the same time it must be remembered that many of the leaders were comparatively young when the prevailing standard of age at the time is taken into account, and further, that the Russian army which opposed Napoleon immediately after Jena, with far greater vigour than the Prussians had done, was an older army still. Besides, the historian who emphasises too strongly the age of the Prussian leaders in 1806 will find himself somewhat embarrassed when he comes to chronicle the victories of the Franco-German War of 1870. There the commander-in-chief, King William I., had begun his soldiering in 1814; Steinmetz, the impetuous leader of the First Army, had actually fought at Leipzig; and Moltke, the Chief of the Staff, was three score years and ten. Clearly, the antiquity of the officer class was not the sole cause of the disaster.

The fact is that, old or young, the Prussian officers were lacking in military qualities. They lacked homogeneity; for although they formed a caste—a caste so exclusive that out of an officer corps of some 8000 strong in 1806, barely 10 per cent were non-noble—nevertheless, the presence of foreigners was a drawback. The Prussian army at Jena included over 1000 officers, in the lower grades, of French extraction, either from French Protestant colonies or from *émigrés* of the Revolution. As regards service, the

officers as a whole can be grouped in three classes. First there were the veterans of the Seven Years' War, with wide experience and traditions of victory; but these were the very old officers, and not even the inspiration of Rossbach and Leuthen could make up for jaded brain tissue and thickened arteries. The second generation consisted of company and squadron commanders, not old, but elderly, who had served on the Rhine and in Poland, but who had outlived their first enthusiasm, and who lacked the memories of victory possessed by their seniors. Like the vast majority of the officers of the army this class was poor in the world's goods, and they had the expenses incidental to middle age. "The bulk of the captains," says Conrady, "were poor, gray-headed gentlemen with a heap of children." The authorities had eventually to realise the straitened circumstances of these officers by allowing them to remain in garrisons near their homes, with the result, as Frederick the Great had predicted, that the army *s'embourgeoisait*. The strictness of military regulation, however, prevented a complete degeneration into civilianism. Not only the officer but his family and household were fettered by red tape, and an officer's nursemaid who allowed her pregnancy to go unreported had to stand her trial by court-martial.

Lastly, there were the young officers. These were full of military ardour, and gave proof of their professional zeal by wide reading of military works which began to appear. But they had other and typical Prussian qualities. They were arrogant, aggressive, and conceited to a degree—capable of despising their enemy and mistaking a boastful vulgarity for military efficiency. In the critical days of 1806, before war was declared, young Prussian officers sharpened their swords on the steps of the French Embassy of Berlin—anticipating the spirit which animated the lines of the Hymn of Hate a century later. Of these insolent swashbucklers, Moltke as a young man was to prove himself the exact antithesis, and in his later years, when he was in a position to impress his individuality upon a younger generation, his efforts were invariably to substitute dignity and efficiency for the overbearing characteristics of the Jena period.

If the officers owed their inefficiency to old age, indolence, and arrogance, the rank and file owed theirs to the unfair system of service which prevailed. The principle of compulsory service was not new in Prussia; it was the old principle of the State on which its greatness was founded. But although the army of Jena had been raised by conscription, it was a conscription from which large classes of persons, as well as whole towns and districts, could claim exemption. In the main the citizen class was exempt, while the peasantry were subject to compulsory service; and, in order to maintain the large army required, it was necessary to fix the term of service at twenty years, although the actual term of training was about so many months. This system of partial conscription had its glaring anomalies, and tended to damp any latent spirit of patriotism in the class called upon to fill the ranks. Its unfairness justifies the rhetorical question of Seeley: "What could be worse tyranny than to seize upon the peasant and subject him for twenty years to a brutal discipline and to the risks of war in order that he might defend a country to which he owed scarcely anything, while those who owed comfort and happiness to the State were not called on to risk anything for it?" It might have been expected that those who had managed to shift their burden on to the conscript class would have held the soldier in respect as the defender of the State. Far otherwise, however, was the case. The fighting man was despised. Did a soldier ask for refreshment at an inn, he was served upon the doorstep lest he might offend the bourgeois within by his presence. And to check desertion, the soldier was subjected to the indignity of having to produce his pass to any wastrel who should demand it of him on the road.

But the real source of decay undermining the superstructure of the Prussian army in 1806 was not mere inefficiency of officers or of men, but the unreality which permeated the whole edifice. The army had degenerated, and not only the army, but the whole conception of war, of which it was the instrument. The traditions of the Frederician era had become petrified, and strategy sank into a rigid formalism and blind adherence to arbitrary



forms and rules. Thence arose that prolixity of plans of operations, that exaggerated importance attached to fortresses and topography, and the frightful complication which rendered every undertaking as slow and as difficult as possible. Hence also that fatal notion which confused the means with the end, and conceived the essentials of war to lie in the execution of cleverly devised manœuvres rather than in the annihilation of the enemy forces. And from these there arose interminable councils of war with their inevitable sequence of changed plans of campaign, with their corollaries of counter-marching and delay. Von der Goltz, indeed, states definitely that it was not the actual inefficiency of the Prussian army, but the sickly-artistic conception of war which led to the disaster.

This school, in his opinion, achieved its crowning triumph when Massenbach, on his retreat from Jena and Auerstädt, ordered Prince Hohenlohe to make a detour in order to place a brook between him and the enemy, and this though the enemy was not there and the brook was almost dry. The defeat of the army at Prenzlau was the consequence, but Massenbach was quite content to disregard all means of safety rather than be guilty of an offence against the accepted rules of military science. In a word, by 1806 the whole end of war had been lost sight of in Prussia. War was no longer an effort to annihilate the main forces of the enemy. It was merely an old-fashioned game, played very slowly and very badly by very old men.

The unreality of the war system of Prussia extended to the service of supply. There were times when troops camped in cornfields and yet starved. Hoffner relates how, just before Jena, the troops of the Prussian main army camped close to huge piles of felled wood, and perished with cold. Even on the following day they had not the wherewithal to cook their food, and it was only decided to seize these supplies for the army after the soldiers had commenced to help themselves and were felling trees in the neighbourhood. In the same critical days the supply of oats for the cavalry ran out entirely. But although abundant supplies were known to be at Jena, the commander-in-chief felt it incumbent on him to write officially to the local authorities



for permission to purchase what was necessary. Before the reply was received, the oats were in French hands. After the battle, large bodies of Prussian troops were two whole days without provisions. On the third day they arrived perfectly famished at a rich village. Prince Augustus of Prussia, moved by compassion, gave permission to his grenadiers, who were nearly dead from exhaustion, to requisition provisions. But the inhabitants raised an uproar, and an old staff officer, attracted by the occurrence, galloped up, and in a paroxysm of indignation made the strongest representations upon the subject to the Prince, alleging hotly that such system of robbery was unknown to the Prussian army and repugnant to its spirit.

There were other and glaring faults in command, training, staff work, and equipment—Scharnhorst declared that the Prussian musket of 1806 was the worst in Europe—but the characteristics set out above are in themselves sufficient to account for any disaster. These characteristics of the Prussian army in the days of Jena, when set side by side with those of the vast military machine which Moltke was to use with such precision and effect in 1866 and 1870, form a remarkable contrast. For the nineteenth century was to see the despised private soldier of Prussia set in a place of honour; the unjust system of partial conscription replaced by universal service; the officer corps transformed into the most virile and professional body in Europe, and the grotesque administrative system developed into an efficiency which became synonymous with the word "Prussian." Upon this great edifice of military reorganization and reform King William I., von Roon, and von Moltke were to set the coping-stone, but the foundations were laid by other and earlier hands.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE REGENERATION OF THE PRUSSIAN ARMY AFTER JENA

THE Treaty of Tilsit which Napoleon and the Tsar Alexander concluded in 1807 at the expense of Prussia robbed the latter of half her territory and left her a population of only 4,500,000 souls. The country was ruined by war, and the Government was crippled with the task of paying off a large war indemnity. Nevertheless, parallel with far-reaching schemes of civil and social reorganization, went the reform of the army, and immediately after the signing of the treaty, in July 1807, Scharnhorst was placed at the head of a Commission for the purpose. Its first task was to call for an enquiry into the capitulations of the fortresses and the surrenders in the field, and as a result of long and laborious investigation seven commanders were sentenced to death, though in only one case was the sentence confirmed by the King, and even in this case the punishment was commuted into exile. Nevertheless, the moral effect was considerable in an army where the officers formed a close corporation, and this preliminary action of the Commission paved the way for other far-reaching reforms.

The principle which guided the chief minister, Stein, and the president of the Commission, Scharnhorst, was that it was the duty of every citizen to defend the State. The day was past for an army like that of Frederick the Great recruited in part from the vagabonds of Europe. A citizen army was, therefore, the ideal common to each reformer. But a soldier like Scharnhorst was in no danger of deluding himself with the notion that a purely citizen army would be more likely to hold its own against Napoleon than the trained conscripts

who had failed at Jena. The citizen army contemplated by Scharnhorst would therefore resemble not a militia but a standing army. The whole nation was to be called upon, and it was to be called upon not for occasional service for brief recurring periods, but for one comparatively long and continuous spell. The one dominating essential of the new military service was that it was to be a continuous portion ; that it should be given to the State in one donation ; and that the system of annual subscriptions of service should be once and for ever abolished. Financial considerations, however, prevented the complete realization of the scheme, and as a compromise the standing army was to be kept at a certain minimum, but was to be provided with the machinery for rapid expansion. The method adopted was to appoint one supernumerary officer to each company, and to dismiss yearly from each company in the first three years twenty men and thereafter ten men, and to replace these by others.

By July 1808 the policy of Prussia was being definitely directed by the great triumvirate of Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Stein, and the military regeneration of the country was proceeding apace, but the whole scheme was wrecked owing to the activity of the secret agents of Napoleon, who intercepted a letter of Stein in which he dwelt upon the lessons to be learnt from the rising in Spain. Napoleon, alarmed at the possibility of a second national rising on his hands, gave way to an outburst of fury : " I have seized letters which make me acquainted with the temper that prevails in Prussia. I will not suffer it. I will be swift like lightning to suppress any outbreak of ill will among you "—and so on. And he took advantage of the occurrence to force a new treaty upon Prussia and to exact the dismissal of Stein. The terms of the Treaty of Tilsit were tightened up, and by a new secret article the whole scheme of military reform so laboriously prepared by Scharnhorst seemed in danger of being completely swept away. The King of Prussia was compelled to engage for ten years not to maintain an army larger than 42,000 men, and at the same time he had to promise that for the same period no unusual levies of militia or civil guard should take place.

The crisis thus brought about proved more memorable



in the history of Prussia than any which had preceded it. Patriotism received a bracing impulse, and the question whether the example of Spain might not, after all, be followed again thrust itself forward into prominence. Meanwhile Scharnhorst was silently picking up the threads of his project and weaving his scheme of military organization anew. By this time many real reforms had been effected. The practice of hiring mercenaries had ceased. Cruel and humiliating punishments had been done away with. The exclusive privilege of the nobles to be officers in the army was to some extent relaxed. Further, the officers ceased to be purveyors for their troops. It was also decided to introduce a system of requisition, so that the mobility of the army should not be delayed by immense trains. Still there was much left to do. Scharnhorst revised his system, reducing the term of service which he had formerly fixed at six years to two, so as to pass through the ranks the largest number possible, and in spite of the hesitation of the King he succeeded in pushing through several details of his project. Every company was to take in five recruits a month and to send away the same number of trained men, while promotion by seniority amongst the officers gave way to a carefully organized system of selection to the higher regimental grades. Thus, despite Napoleon's conditions, a firm reserve of trained men was gradually built up, and these men were maintained, while on furlough, in an efficient condition by secret drilling, sergeants being sent round the country for the purpose.

In the war between France and Austria in 1809 Prussia remained inactive, for Frederick William was still fearful of irritating Napoleon. Napoleon, however, was not content with mere inaction. He did not want purely passive obedience; he needed active help. He forced Prussia to sign a convention to supply 20,000 men for the invasion of Russia, and made her collect vast magazines and supplies for his use, and to place the country with all its fortresses and supplies at his disposal. Such Prussian troops as were left had to remain distant from the line of march of the invading army, and no levy, no assembly of troops, and no military movement were to take place without the express sanction of the Emperor.



Prussia's cup of humiliation was full and she had to drain it to the dregs. "All is lost, including honour," wrote Blücher to Gneisenau in despair.

The more active spirits of the patriotic party now found their position impossible. Stein had been for years in complete retirement. Scharnhorst and Clausewitz buried themselves in Silesia. Gneisenau went to Russia and Sweden. It seemed as if all their patriotic efforts had been thrown away. But the terrible winter of 1812-1813 brought about a transformation as if by magic. The indescribable procession of broken French soldiers creeping westwards in interminable sequence raised new hope. When it was realized at Berlin how complete was the destruction of the French army the cry "Let us free ourselves" gained fresh force. Frederick William issued a stirring appeal to his people telling them that their choice now lay between an honourable peace and destruction. His words found a ready echo in the heart of the nation. The enthusiasm to enlist was astonishing. A month before war was declared Niebuhr wrote that the crowd of volunteers before the town hall was like a baker's shop in a famine. Then, allied with Russia, on March 17 Frederick William declared war upon France. The War of Liberation had begun, and Prussia in 1813 with an army of nominally 42,000 men had in reality over 150,000 trained to arms. Though defeated at Lützen and Bautzen the Prussians fought so tenaciously that Napoleon could not profit by his victories. He admitted that the Prussians were his most dangerous antagonists, and at the culminating battle of Leipzig, Prussian troops played an important part in the allied victory.

By this time Prussia by a superb effort had brought her total contingent up to nearly 300,000 men, for a Landwehr had been organized on the principle of universal service. The brunt of the spring campaign, however, fell upon the regulars reinforced by the short term men, or *Krumper*. The steady and unremitting toil of patriotic Prussians had its reward, and the army, not improvised, but carefully built up and trained, justified a thousand-fold the six years' work spent upon it. But it must be remembered that the triumph of 1813 was above all a vindication for the regular army—

the regular army, that is, purged in the fire of remorseless reform. The Krumper system, ingenious as it was, had been in operation for too short a period to furnish any considerable war reserve, and the real reserve was to be found in the old soldiers who had received their training in the old army. And as for the Landwehr, in spite of the self-sacrificing spirit of the classes called to its ranks, it made but slow progress. In the autumn of 1813 some of its units still lacked uniform and equipment. As for the leaders of the army, it was chiefly the much abused officer corps—the Junkers of Jena—who in 1813 led the Prussian army to victory, though it is true that the officer corps had been considerably renovated since 1806. Of 7000 officers serving at the time of Jena and Auerstädt, nearly 4000 fought in the War of Liberation. The Prussian officer had fully redeemed his reputation, for the military greatness of Prussia which had perished at Jena was born again to a further century of brilliant life.

## CHAPTER V

### MOLTKE'S BOYHOOD—SERVICE IN THE DANISH ARMY— ADMISSION INTO THE PRUSSIAN ARMY

WHILE the military greatness of Prussia was thus being restored, Moltke had begun the apprenticeship of his trade. His father had made but a poor Cincinnatus and had turned his hand to soldiering again. In the year 1809 a detachment of combined Dutch and Danish troops marched against a force commanded by a Prussian colonel who had organized an insurrection against Napoleonic rule. In this expedition the father of Helmuth von Moltke took part in command of his Landwehr regiment, and in 1811 he was posted to garrison duty at Kiel. In the same year he took two of his sons, Fritz and Helmuth, to the Military Academy at Copenhagen.

Of his cadet life the Field-Marshal years afterwards said, "It was truly a Spartan education. The cadets were treated far too strictly. The tone was very hard ; of love or sympathy there was no trace. The institution did not give the cadets a moral upbringing. There was a visible mistrust of them which was extraordinarily injurious in its effects. The pupils who passed through this school without damage had had a hard, but hardening, schooling. Yet it is right to say that it produced soldiers who thought in every respect as soldiers. The one attractive feature was the feeling of *camaraderie* and the deep inviolable loyalty of the cadets to one another from the highest to the lowest." In a brief autobiography, written in 1866, Moltke wrote in the same strain : " Without any relations or friends there we passed a dull time ; the discipline was strict, even harsh, and we were early accustomed to all kinds of privations. However, it is with gratitude that I call to mind many kindnesses that

the family of General Hegermann-Lindencrone showed us. Their beautiful country-seat near the town was on Sundays the scene of many a game with the three sons, who have since then distinguished themselves in the Danish Army. My friendship with this noble, highly educated family has exercised the greatest influence on my development."

His industry was intense and never flagged, but his recollections of the Academy were that its influence was positively harmful. "I had no education," he wrote years later to one of his brothers, "but thrashing. I have had no chance of forming a character. I am often painfully conscious of it. This want of self-reliance and constant reference to the opinions of others, even the preponderance of reason over inclination, often gives me moral depression, such as others feel from opposite causes. They were in such a hurry to efface every prominent characteristic, every peculiarity, as they would have nipped betimes every shoot of a yew hedge, that the result was weakness of character, the most fatal of all." Moltke, however, seems to have over-estimated the blighting effect of the Academy on the intellect. It does not seem to have struck his father in the same light. In his Memoirs he sums up his famous son's sojourn at the place in a few curt words: "Almost every year there he had fever and once the measles." More exciting was the young cadet's escape from capture by the English. In 1813 his father came to Copenhagen and took Helmuth and his brother back to Holstein for a few weeks. At that time Denmark was at war with England, and the appearance of some English men-of-war in the Great Belt caused no little excitement. The vessel which carried the Moltkes passed so close to the enemy brigs that its capture seemed certain. But in the gathering darkness the small Danish vessel managed to slip away unobserved, and the father and his two boys arrived safely at Augustenhof where the family had again settled.

Four years later Moltke passed the examination at the head of the cadet class and became a page to the King of Denmark, still remaining at the Academy. In 1819 his course came to a close, and on the whole list Moltke passed fourth in order of merit. The subjects in which he was



apparently weakest were Tactics and the Art of War. Examiners' reports are not, however, necessarily the last word of human wisdom, and there is a story to the effect that during young Moltke's career at the Academy, an inspecting functionary remarked about him, "That fellow will never make a soldier."

Moltke was soon gazetted as second lieutenant in the Oldenburg Infantry Regiment, and a year later he was posted to the Rifle Brigade, which was always considered a distinction. His service in the Danish Army was, however, destined to be of but short duration, for a visit, while on leave, to Berlin with his father altered the whole course of his life. An older relative wrote to him pointing out the more favourable professional outlook afforded by service in the Prussian Army, and the idea appealed at once to Lieutenant Moltke. He asked and obtained leave to resign his Danish commission. His commanding officer in forwarding the acceptance of his resignation expressed some surprise at the absence of difficulties experienced in entering the Prussian service, but there was really little ground for wonder. By birth Moltke was a German, and his father and uncles had served honourably as officers in the Prussian Army; and the Intelligence Branch of the Prussian War Office was probably not at all averse from securing the services of the son of a Prussian officer who had necessarily a good knowledge of the Danish Army, and who spoke and wrote Danish fluently.

In 1822 Helmuth von Moltke successfully passed the difficult examination required for a Prussian commission, his certificate being signed by Field-Marshal Count Gneisenau as one of the Presidents of the Board. He was then posted as second lieutenant to the 8th Infantry Regiment stationed at Frankfort-on-the-Oder, and his long service in the Prussian Army had definitely begun.

## CHAPTER VI

### EARLY YEARS IN THE PRUSSIAN ARMY

REGIMENTAL life in a garrison town on meagre pay—the daily rate was less than eighteen pence—was a sphere too constricted for a hard-working young soldier like Moltke, and in 1823 he presented himself at the entrance examination for the War School or Staff College at Berlin, of which Clausewitz was then the commandant. Here, as he wrote later, “the lectures of Major von Canitz on the History of War, of Professor Ritter on Geography, and Professor Erman on Physics interested me very much. As my father’s fortune had been dissipated by wars and his many misfortunes, I had no addition to my pay from home and I was compelled to be very economical. However, I succeeded in taking some lessons in languages.” For linguistic study Moltke had, from his mother, an inherited aptitude, and his energy, his powerful intellect, and scholarly turn of mind were valuable aids. He was in later years to gain the reputation—in part a tribute to this gift of tongues and in part to his discretion—of being able to be “silent in seven languages.” German was his mother tongue, Danish was the language of his childhood and military apprenticeship, French and English he learnt in boyhood, and the latter was strengthened by his marriage with an English-speaking wife. A knowledge of Turkish came from his sojourn in the Near East. Hard study in Russian at Berlin and a long stay in Italy were further to enrich his store.<sup>1</sup>

During his course at the Staff College ill-health and

<sup>1</sup> In later life Moltke added Spanish to his stock of languages.

poverty had to be fought. How poor he was can hardly be realized even when every allowance is made for the higher purchasing power of money ninety years ago. "My finances," he says in a letter referring to a journey to Silesia, where he had been sent to drink the waters, "which are sadly reduced by my journey to Dresden, and above all by paying off my Berlin bills, require the strictest economy. I am lucky in having a harbour of refuge with my friend von Fröbel at Glatz where I may stay for a time at no cost. I am afraid that I can only afford the expense of three months at the baths at most ; for I must keep enough for the return journey." The same lack of funds is revealed again before he closes. A Polish lady whom he had met at Salzbrunn invited him to accompany her daughters and herself to her country-house for a visit, and before starting he tells his mother, "I am setting out for Poland with eight thalers of my own and five more which I have borrowed." It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of a proud and sensitive young soldier forced to make a country-house visit in a foreign land with less than two pounds in his pocket.

The practical side of Moltke's character, however, peeps out, and he philosophically balances up the debit and credit side of things in general. "However much I may have to pinch I can never regret having seen so much for such a relatively small outlay. And if I may only hope to keep as well and hearty as I now am, I have not paid for it too dear. So I am in the best of spirits and only wish that you may all be as flourishing as I am ; excepting"—and this is the only fly in the ointment—"excepting only in the matter of money." It was in this more cheerful frame of mind that he returned to Berlin to continue his Staff College course, passing out in the following year, 1826. His leaving certificate is of interest not only as showing Moltke's capabilities, but also as giving a clear idea of the curriculum which budding staff-officers of that day were required to master.

Second Lieutenant von Moltke, 8th Infantry Regiment, has attended the following lectures in the War School from October 1823 to July 1826 :



*First Year's Course.    Second Year's Course.    Third Year's Course.*

Mathematics (with- out calculus).	Spherical Trigono- metry, and the necessary elements of Mechanics.	History of certain campaigns.
Military Geography.		Attack and de- fence of fortifica- tions.
Universal History.	Calculus.	General Literature.
Statistics.	Military Geography.	General Staff Work.
Artillery.	Fortification.	Surveying.
Tactics.	German Literature.	
Theory of Surveying.	Tactical and strategic Manœuvres.	
Survey.	Surveying.	
French.	French.	
Horsemastership.	Natural Science.	

The above-named has written good essays on the practical military subjects set.

The result of his scientific studies has been very good.

His conduct was blameless.

Herewith is certified the accordance of this certificate with the opinions of the masters and superiors whose names are in the class books.

In 1827 Moltke rejoined his regiment at Frankfort, where he was appointed to the command of a somewhat disorderly cadet school for training officers. It was difficult work, but he performed it to the satisfaction of his superiors, and he was able to add to his income by giving private lessons. By this time he had made his first essay in literature, having published anonymously a short story called *The Two Friends*, for which the publisher failed to pay. In the following year he was appointed to a topographical survey, on which he was occupied for three summers in Silesia and Posen. The work was interesting and congenial, and during the period occupied on it Moltke was a welcome guest at country-houses in the area. The survey was under the supervision of the Chief of the Staff, General von Müffling, an officer of the highest professional attainments and endowed with a refreshing sense of humour. Discussing one day a quite impossible mountain, and the officer of that particular map-sheet asserting that it really did exist, the general closed the argument by replying politely, "Then science will indeed be enriched." Nearly forty



years later Moltke, himself possessed of a keen sense of the humorous, and quite possibly the victim of the episode, thought the repartee worth preserving in a brief autobiography.

During the winters he was working in his office on the survey and taking lessons in Russian and dancing, but he found time to devote himself to literary and historical work. It was the epoch of the separation of Belgium from Holland, and he produced a pamphlet on the relationship between the two countries. The work was not light, and Moltke set about it with characteristic thoroughness. He read "above a thousand pages quarto and nearly four thousand octavo" and found that he had to bear the burden of every historical writer, that of "having to read whole volumes to establish a single simple fact, only that the reader may skip every other sentence and not read it after all." The following year a second pamphlet gave an account of the internal conditions and social state of Poland, a subject which his long visits to Polish country-houses and his knowledge of Russian qualified him to deal with. A far more ponderous task was one which straitened means compelled him to undertake—the translation of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, six thousand pages in twelve octavo volumes. The pay was to be but £75 on publication and £37 : 10s. when five hundred copies should have been sold. At first he seems to have grappled with the work light-heartedly enough, but gradually the frightful millstone round his neck dragged him deeper in the slough of depression, and he was fain to approach his brother Ludwig to co-operate with him for a share of the scanty spoil. And just as he was at work upon the eleventh volume the publisher failed, and all Moltke could secure was a composition of less than £25 from the bankrupt. The translation has never seen the light.

Meanwhile, in 1832, Moltke had reached the immediate goal of his ambition by his appointment to the General Staff, and in the following year he was promoted first lieutenant. It was work into which he threw himself heart and soul, although, except for the Russo-Turkish Campaign of 1828-1829 and the Polish Rebellion of 1831,

there was little of current strategical or tactical interest. His financial position had improved, and his pay amounted now to nearly £7 a month, with some small allowances, although the necessity of providing himself with two horses was a very serious consideration. The purchase of the second compelled him to apply to his mother for assistance, which he did in a letter in which dignity and affection are intertwined :

For these reasons, dear mother, I am compelled once more to have recourse to your kindness, to beg you if possible to help me with 200 thalers. What troubles me is that I should thus again reduce your already narrow income ; and it would be a real satisfaction to me if you would allow me to make good the loss in dividends which you will incur, which I can very well do. But if circumstances forbid your acceding to my request I shall of course submit, and thank you with sincere affection for all you have already done for me. The loan is not necessary—that is, it is not absolutely indispensable ; for if it comes to the worst I must and will purchase on credit, but I shall then buy dear and at a disadvantage, and be hard pressed to pay. If, however, you think you can grant my request, I shall have the capital once for all and without special ill-luck cannot be a great loser and may even make money by it. This certainly is the moment when I most need help and I hope it will be the last. So, dear mother, I commend my petition to your kindness, and if granting it does not involve you personally in any great disadvantage, I beg you to manage it for me. It is of course to be understood that the advance should be taken from your capital, for out of your income it would be impossible and I would not accept it.

Of his life at Berlin a fair idea may be gathered from his letters home :

At seven in the morning I have my breakfast and set to work. I work in the mornings at a criticism of the strategic possibilities of the Thuringian forest or a historical précis of the 1762 campaign. At nine o'clock, whatever the weather, I mount one of my horses, both very good beasts, and take a brisk ride of four to eight miles, and dismount at the office of the General Staff, where I am on duty till two o'clock. Then I go to the Café for dinner and afterwards find my other horse waiting for me at the door, and I go for a short ride. Then I work from four to eight at my translation and after that usually go into society. The

hair-dresser calls and arranges my hair in the most tasteful style. At eight there is a ball at this prince's or that minister's. I only remain just so long as I have agreeable partners, and often before going to bed I translate a few pages of Gibbon. In the last fortnight I have been to eleven balls.

In 1834 he was sent to Italy on a secret mission and later to Copenhagen. His services were rewarded by the Order of St. John, a distinction which came as a complete surprise to Moltke, for it was one of the most highly esteemed orders in Germany. A month after this piece of good fortune he received his coveted promotion to captain, passing over the heads of all the lieutenants in his regiment ; and, by becoming the only captain in the army who had entered as late as 1822, he made good the four years he had lost by joining the Danish service. A staff-officer, however, who had just received the rare boon of accelerated promotion, who had won a highly coveted order, who was acquainted with five modern languages, and possessed marked literary and historical ability, was not likely to content himself with the prospect of a humdrum existence in a War Office in a period of profound peace. Moltke began to experience a great wish to go forth into the world and to widen his experience by observing foreign men and manners. To a man of his tastes and ambition London and Paris held out but few attractions, but he had a great desire to see Constantinople, both for the notoriety which it had recently gained, and also influenced no doubt by the many months of toil over the story of Byzantium which he had wrestled with in Gibbon. He accordingly applied for leave of absence sufficiently long, as he thought, to allow a three weeks' stay in Constantinople and a further journey through Greece, and thence home by Rome and Naples. In the autumn of 1835 he left Berlin, destined, as it turned out, to spend four years in Turkey, and to have his first experience of war.



## CHAPTER VII

### MOLTKE IN THE EAST—HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE OF WAR

THOUGH Moltke's rôle was but that of a traveller, if he had searched for a country likely to afford employment for a highly educated professional soldier he could not have made a better choice. For a dozen years before 1835 Turkey had been severely damaged in war. She had been engaged, and unsuccessfully, against England, France and Russia ; had failed to put down a national insurrection in Greece ; and was forced to yield large tracts of the empire to a successful rebel, Mehemet Ali, the Viceroy of Egypt. In the succession of struggles the Turkish Navy had been blown to pieces by an allied fleet at Navarino ; French and Russian armies had operated on Turkish soil ; Greece had received her independence ; and the only real attempt at Turkish military reform had necessitated the wholesale slaughter of the supposed safeguard of sultans—the Janisaries.

A few weeks after his arrival at Constantinople, Moltke was presented to Chosref Pasha, who was then the right-hand man of the Sultan Mahmoud II. The first conversation between the two turned to the subject of a war game of which the pasha possessed the necessary apparatus without, however, the ability to make use of it. Chosref begged his visitor to enlighten him, and on a subsequent visit the latter prepared a tactical scheme for two Turkish generals. The pasha had also put several questions to Moltke on the subject of Prussia's system of defence and revealed a considerable knowledge of Prussian military organization. Moltke's high professional knowledge deeply impressed the Turkish official, who realized the importance of having



a man of Moltke's calibre at hand in the existing condition of Turkey. He accordingly addressed a formal request through the Embassy, asking that Moltke's leave might be extended so that the Porte might have the benefit of his advice on military affairs.

In order to please the Porte the Prussian Government sent a favourable reply, and Moltke now became the confidential military adviser of Chosref Pasha, who entrusted his new acquaintance with the execution of several matters, to which the latter applied himself with his wonted zeal. In the first place, he was to draw up a scheme for the reorganization of the Turkish Army and for the introduction into it of the Prussian military system. Besides this scheme for military reform, Moltke had many other duties to carry out for the Sultan—to whom, however, he had not yet been officially presented. His skill as a topographer led to his being requested to make a survey of the Dardanelles and its shores, of both sides of the Bosphorus and of Constantinople itself. He also inspected the fortifications of the Dardanelles. Later he examined the newly constructed defences of Varna, and had, further, to give his opinion and advice as to the construction of bridges, palaces, water-works and reservoirs, besides preparing plans for them. The work, as will be readily understood, was arduous, especially in a country like Turkey where Prussian energy and efficiency were often inadequately supported, but it had its compensations, for it enabled Moltke to secure unrestricted admission to all military works of importance.

The valuable professional assistance rendered by Moltke was not overlooked by the shrewd Mahmoud II., and on January 19, 1837, Moltke was desired to attend a private audience with the Sultan, who, having been greatly pleased with the different works of his Prussian adviser, wished to make his acquaintance. The interview was conducted with all the adjuncts of Oriental etiquette, and the Sultan utilized the occasion to present Moltke with a Turkish Order, while expressing the hope that he would continue to render his valuable military assistance. An opportunity for rendering further service was not long delayed, for three months later Moltke accompanied the Sultan on a

journey to Silistria and Shumla, this latter visit affording him an opportunity of witnessing the manœuvres of a militia battalion at Shumla—an experience which drew from him the pregnant remark that “a field day at Shumla is very different from one at Potsdam.” The lesson had not been lost on Mahmoud either, who realized the need of further Prussianizing his army. Up to this period hardly any but French and English officers had been employed as instructors for the Turkish Army, but the excellence of the work performed by Moltke had influenced the Sultan in favour of everything Prussian so far as military reform was concerned. He applied to the Prussian Government for further assistance, and in August 1837 two more captains from the Headquarters Staff, who were later joined by a third, arrived at the Turkish capital.

During the year Moltke had received a formal recognition of his valuable services from the War Ministry at Berlin as well as further recognition, equally gratifying, from the Turkish Government, but in his private life it was a year marked for him with a special sorrow. On New Year's Eve, 1836, his mother had written him from Schleswig: “I am sitting quite alone in my lonely little room thinking of you. The clock will soon strike the last hour of this year. What will the new one have in store for us?” For the son it was to bring one of the greatest sorrows of a man's life—the loss of a dearly loved mother. Henrietta von Moltke died on May 27, 1837; dying, as she had lived, heroically, for with unfailing determination she had concealed her failing health from her children. The blow was a grievous one for her soldier son, for the bonds of affection between him and his mother had been of the strongest nature. In his letters to her which are preserved, covering a period of fifteen years, there breathes a deep and unswerving affection, couched in a strain of filial devotion. Even as a grown man of thirty-seven he could close his letters with the simple words, “keep well and think lovingly of your Helmuth”; “always love your Helmuth”; “always remember with affection your truly loving son Helmuth.” His mother, indeed, was almost always in his mind. He thinks of her when gazing at a beautiful scene

of nature, because she, too, loves such beauty ; he looks at a certain star every night because it is her favourite of stars ; he encloses in his letters little trifles, but remembrances for her—some moss and violets from the Schneekoppe, “ a little flower which I plucked for you on a high cliff of the Erzgebirge,” or an olive spray from the grave of Patroclus. In his last known letter to her, a few weeks before her death, he has to confess that he has forgotten for the moment whether her birthday is the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th of the month. “ So, to make sure, I thought of you on each of those three days, and prayed earnestly for your happiness for years to come.” Such was the character of the man to be lampooned years later by a bitter French pen as “ a vulture, lean and silent, as it devours its prey.”

Happily Moltke was soon to be afforded an assuagement for his sorrow in the excitement afforded by active service. In the following year the Sultan, finding himself once again on the point of war with his rebellious vassal Mehemet Ali, thought it well to place a body of troops on the frontier of Asia Minor, under the command of Hafiz Pasha. The official reason assigned for this precautionary measure was the necessity of quelling revolts among the Kurds on the borders of Asia ; but Mehemet Ali was not to be deceived, and retorted by despatching Egyptian reinforcements into Syria. The Sultan, too, was shrewd enough to realize that here was a chance of allowing his general to profit by the professional assistance of Prussian officers, and Moltke and Captain von Muhlbach were selected for the purpose.

Journeying forward on horseback across the snow-clad mountains, and crossing the Euphrates by ferry, Moltke and his companion eventually reached the headquarters of the Turkish army of the Taurus, where they reported themselves to Hafiz Pasha. A few days later, at the Pasha's request, Moltke started on a reconnoitring expedition to the borders of Syria. At first his route lay westwards, but after a week he turned east again in the direction of the Euphrates, and working down the river, reached Rumkaleh, a fine fortress, formerly the old Roman castle Zeugma. From here Moltke proceeded farther south to Biradschik, where the river first becomes navigable, and



at once recognized the strategical importance of the town with its rocky fortress. Thence his route was to the Tigris, down which Moltke proceeded with his companion to Mossul, on a raft made of a slight superstructure laid upon fifty or sixty inflated sheepskins. The return journey, which was made overland, was destined to be of special importance, for during it Moltke had his first experience of war.

While travelling with a caravan towards the north-west, he learnt that a Turkish force had marched northwards in pursuit of a rebellious Kurdish tribe. This was too good an opportunity to be lost, and Moltke instantly quitted the caravan, overtaking the force at nightfall. The commander, with 3000 infantry and a few guns, was moving up the left bank of the river, where the Kurdish chieftain had entrenched himself on a lofty rock some thousand feet high, and connected with the valley by but a single track. A day was spent in an ineffectual bombardment by the Turkish artillery, and to the trained professional intelligence of Moltke it was clear that more decisive results might be obtained by demolition. He volunteered to reconnoitre the place with this object. Permission was granted, and accompanied by two or three Kurds, Moltke made his way up to the stronghold during the night. The task was difficult and dangerous, and the reconnoitring party was forced to retreat, but the threat was sufficient, for the rebel chief surrendered tamely enough next day.

Later in the year a campaign was made against the disaffected inhabitants of Karsan under the command of Hafiz Pasha himself. During this expedition Moltke was employed chiefly on reconnaissance duty, but his skill as a tactician led to his being consulted on one occasion as to the best way to attack a village which the inhabitants had placed in a state of defence, and the advice which was followed yielded immediately successful results. At an attack later against a height defended by men and women, Moltke was not present—a fact which caused him no regret. He wrote later :

I assure you I was not sorry. You need not envy us this war ; it is full of horrors. Besides many thousand herd of cattle about



six hundred prisoners arrived, many of them women and children. One lad about seven years of age had gunshot wounds, and we extracted the bullet which is now lying beside me. He will very likely recover. Women are also among the wounded ; but to find children with bayonet wounds gives one a melancholy insight into the whole business.

To the credit of the two Prussian officers it should be said that they washed and bandaged many of the prisoners' wounds, and exerted themselves to procure food, of which the poor creatures were sorely in need.

During the summer Moltke received a fresh commission, for Hafiz was anxious to ascertain whether the Euphrates could be made available for military and other transport. This had been declared impossible by the Kurdish boatmen on the spot, but Moltke had a raft constructed and set out. The force of the current was terrible at times, but Moltke stuck doggedly to his task, and though his craft was half swamped, and a dozen times nearly dashed to pieces, he successfully threaded a maze of cataracts, and returned overland with a detailed report for his chief. Map-making and tours of inspection occupied him for the rest of the year, and on the 29th October he reached Malatia, after riding 760 miles in twenty-six days. Here he remained till the following January, partly occupied in completing his surveys, and partly in helping to train the troops, of whom 40 battalions were then assembled.

Great events were now at hand, for by April 1839 the time had come when some decision must be arrived at in the struggle between the Sultan and the Viceroy of Egypt. The continuous state of military preparation was a severe drain on Turkish finances, and the Turkish troops were being wasted by sickness, and were deserting freely. The Porte had 70,000 men under arms in Asia Minor, but they were split up into three main groups, whereas the Egyptian forces, which lay at that time in the neighbourhood of Aleppo, were under the single command of Ibrahim Pasha—Mehemet Ali's son. The question to be decided was whether Ibrahim would make a dash for Constantinople or turn upon Hafiz Pasha in Malatia and attack him. Moltke held that the former course was the one the enemy was more likely to

adopt, and to counter it recommended that Hafiz should take up a position menacing the Egyptian commander's right flank. This move would probably have the effect of compelling Ibrahim to suspend his march to deal with the threat against his flank, and it was advisable that all the available Turkish troops should be concentrated at Biradschik, on the left bank of the Euphrates. They were then to move forward to the right bank and dig themselves in, in which position the flanks of the Turkish force would be secured by the winding course of the river. It was true that an unbridged river would then be in the Turkish rear, but Moltke looked upon this circumstance as a positive advantage, for, as he shrewdly remarked, "a bridge would only be useful for deserters, but as matters now stand every man must hold his ground or perish."

Broadly speaking, Moltke's plan was a combination of the strategic offensive with a tactical defensive, and it promised good results, but it was wrecked by the impatience and superstition of Hafiz. While Ibrahim's army was as yet some distance off, the Mollahs induced the pasha to leave his stronghold at Biradschik, and advance to Nisib, where the flanks of his army would be completely in the air. Ibrahim, indeed, was at first inclined to play a cautious game, and showed no inclination to deal with Hafiz, but the pin-pricks of several minor Turkish raids stung him into action, and on June 20 he advanced to the attack. For a moment, while his forces were temporarily divided by a manœuvre leading up to an attack on Hafiz's left flank, there was a possibility of a Turkish victory, for a bold stroke launched by the whole Turkish force might have led to a defeat in detail of the Egyptian army. Moltke strenuously urged this step, but Hafiz was not equal to the task, and contented himself with a useless exhibition of his miserable cavalry. With this favourable opportunity let slip there remained but one course, namely, to fall back while there was yet time to the entrenched position at Biradschik, where it was impossible to be surrounded, and where the Turkish troops would have no choice but between death and glory. Moltke pointed this out with emphasis to Hafiz, but the vacillating mind of the Turkish commander could not be

stiffened into soldierly resolution. Again and again Moltke reiterated his advice, but even when it was clear that Ibrahim was rapidly outflanking him on both sides, Hafiz would not move. Priestly exhortations had outweighed the advice of the professional soldier, and Moltke had to content himself with the prophecy, "By to-morrow at sundown you will know what it is to be a commander without an army."

Not even the Witch of Endor had been a truer seer. Ibrahim advanced in three columns and placed himself between the Turkish camp at Nisib and their magazine at Biradschik. Moltke had by now ceased to be the official adviser of the pasha, for he had formally resigned that position when his advice had been neglected. But he was not the man to leave a commander in the lurch at a critical moment. He threw himself heart and soul into the fight, giving every assistance he could, but the Turkish soldiers, outnumbered, out-generalled and out-gunned, made but a sorry resistance. The left wing speedily retired and could on no account be induced to advance, while the reserve divisions made several attempts to get out of the line of fire, and whole battalions stood with hands uplifted, crying aloud to Allah. Finally the cavalry left their position among the reserves and advanced to the attack. But the first few shells threw them into the wildest confusion, and in their flight they dragged the terrified infantry with them in wild disarray. All was now over, and in the frightful confusion it was a case of every man for himself. Making his way through the mob Moltke met the other two Prussian officers—for another had been sent out in addition to Moltke and von Muhlbach—and they had no choice but to join in the *sauve qui peut*. That night they reached Aintab, and from there they pushed on, without food for themselves or their horses, to Marasch, a ride of ninety miles.

Later the Prussian officers rejoined their now armyless general, and were met with the news of the death of the Sultan Mahmoud, and their own letter of recall. They rode back to the coast—shouting, like the Ten Thousand of old, "Thalatta ! Thalatta !" at the first glimpse of the sea—and on August 3 embarked for Constantinople. Moltke's stay at Constantinople was marked chiefly by a narrative of his



adventures in Turkish—which he could now speak fluently—to his old patron Chosref, and by his successful intercession for the unfortunate Hafiz Pasha. “It was hardly his fault,” said Moltke, “if instead of giving him 80,000 men he was allowed only half that number, and the various corps were not placed under one general, as we had repeatedly advised in our despatches. Nor could the faulty arrangement of the army, formed as it was of two-thirds Kurdish troops, be set down to him—troops who were loth to remain in the service and who turned tail and fled when it came to the point.” On the 9th of September 1839, Moltke and his companions embarked and steamed along the coast of the Black Sea, and up the Danube, whence he proceeded overland to Berlin, and once more resumed his position as a captain of the General Staff.

Although Moltke’s experience in the East had been associated with defeat, and although like Frederick and Peter the Great he had galloped off from his first battlefield—in his case, however, with the amplest justification—the campaign he had made was of infinite service to him. He had left the General Staff at Berlin just at the time when the wave of military reform which had burst forth after Jena had begun to subside, and when the lessons learnt in war were in danger of being forgotten in the post-Waterloo era of peace. Further, he had left it at that critical period of a soldier’s life when notions acquired from arduous theoretical study alone are apt to petrify. This danger was particularly likely to affect a student like Moltke, whose higher military education had been received at the feet of the philosophical Clausewitz. Not that Clausewitz was merely a theorist of war. Far from it; his practical experience of warfare both in defeat and victory was of an extraordinarily wide range. But its very extent had led his systematic and logical mind to endeavour to construct a framework of theory on to which he could fit his wide and varied experiences of the field. With such experience behind him it was impossible for a man like Clausewitz ever to develop into a mere academic student of war. With a pupil not so favoured with reminiscences of active service the case was widely different. A staff officer reared in the school, whose great text-book was *On War*,



would, unless such theory were seasoned with practical experience, run a very serious risk of developing into a military pedant.

From the possibility of such untoward fate Moltke was saved by a rough-and-tumble campaign in a semi-civilized country, where half-trained and, in some cases, wholly unwilling soldiers were led by unpractical and unskilled commanders. It was an invaluable revelation for a Moltke to discover that the subtleties of an appreciation elaborately prepared can be wrecked in a moment by the incapacity or inexperience of the instrument for whom it is devised. That human element which can never be properly appreciated at a desk becomes startlingly apparent in action in the field, and few staff officers in preparing a tactical project could have foreseen that the niceties of their plan could be set aside by a deference to fanatical priests. Yet that was what happened at Nisib, and led to Moltke's first and only defeat. Though such a perversion of warfare was unlikely ever to occur in Western Europe, the lesson was probably not lost upon Moltke that there are conditions which limit the power of the strongest will, and that such conditions must be taken into account.

Apart from this lesson in human nature the experience gained by Moltke in the East was valuable through its variety. His skill in surveying fostered that instinct for "ground" and "country" which is essential for a commander. His work on this side was immense, for he explored and laid the foundations for a map of an enormous area, and his surveys were eventually handed over to the great geographer Kiepert for the reconstruction of the map of Asia Minor. Apart from this topographical work he had much to do towards training the improvised Turkish troops, and, further, during the two years he was attached to Hafiz Pasha his position was almost identical with that of the Chief of the Staff of a European army. On the other hand, he was sufficiently a free lance to be able to undertake actual leadership and direction as exemplified by his reconnaissance of the Kurdish stronghold, and his active assistance during the ill-starred battle of Nisib. That he bore himself on all occasions as an intrepid soldier is a matter of record. A few weeks

after Nisib one of his Prussian fellow-officers wrote: "Moltke has behaved in all circumstances as a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*. Though ill and by rights in bed he was never wanting when needed. He was always with every reconnaissance, daring and dashing. The Turks looked upon him as a sort of legendary hero." The four years spent in the East, monotonous, laborious and unfortunate though they were, were thus a fine school in which to gain practical experience, and to develop the initiative and acceptance of responsibility required of a commander in the field.

Moltke was a regular and conscientious correspondent, and in 1841 he collected and revised a series of letters sent from the East to his mother, father, and one of his sisters, publishing them under the title of *Letters on the Conditions and Events in Turkey in the Years 1835-39*. These letters, of which there are fifty-six in all, give an excellent account of Turkey, and range from an account of life in an Armenian household to a description of the siege of Troy, or from a brief description as an eye-witness of the punishment of the bastinado to a vivid narrative of the battle of Nisib. Military questions naturally received some prominence, and Moltke brings out the strength of Constantinople, the capabilities of the Dardanelles for defence, and the value of the Balkans as a defensive barrier line. Unfortunately, he merely touches on the strategic aspects of the complex and amphibious war carried on between Mahmoud II. and his vassal Mehemet Ali.

These letters were not the sole literary fruit of Moltke's sojourn in the East, for there appeared in 1845 *The Russo-Turkish Campaign in European Turkey, 1828-29, described by Baron von Moltke, Major in the Royal Prussian General Staff*. It is significant of the comparative obscurity of the author prior to his brilliant successes of 1866, that, when an English version of the work appeared in 1854, the translator gravely stated that Baron Moltke is "now dead." The volume is a noteworthy contribution to military literature, and is written with a terse clearness of style not usual in German professional works, but it is somewhat to be regretted that Moltke decided to deal with merely one sector—though undoubtedly, the more important one—of the whole theatre of war. He omits the Asiatic campaign, and the strategic perspective of

the war as a whole is thus undoubtedly obscured. As a critic of land warfare Moltke shows himself as of the highest rank, and his intimate knowledge of the terrain he describes was an immense advantage to him. The mistake made by the Russian commanders in crossing the Danube with too weak a force, the delay round Shumla, the incapacity of the Turkish commanders, and the brilliant organizing power and the strategic boldness of Diebitsch are clearly brought out. But in one respect Moltke's work on the war of 1828-29 is decidedly lacking—the important influence exercised by the maritime command enjoyed by Russia.

It would be untrue to say that Moltke was insensible to the value of the capture of Varna and Sizeboli by the Russians, or that he overlooked the importance of the factor of sea power in a future Russo-Turkish war. On the contrary, he says: "In the event of a new war there can be no doubt as to which Power will have dominion on the Euxine. And it seems far from improbable that the Russians might land their army at once on the Thracian Chersonese, and by that means avoid a long march through a desolate country, as well as the resistance of the fortresses and the difficulties of the Balkans, and decide the fate of the war at once by an attack upon Constantinople." But it is, nevertheless, true to assert that this question of maritime command does not receive the attention which it merits. His survey of the war is not broad enough. There is little about the possibility of operating upon interior lines vouchsafed to the side—Russian or Turkish—enjoying command of the Black Sea. The unique maritime defile formed by the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmora is not sufficiently brought into the picture. And he is silent about the necessity for Turkey to command the Aegean and Mediterranean so as to ensure safe passage of soldiers from Tunis and Egypt and Syria to the Dardanelles. There is little, indeed, in his volume to show that he realized the fact that although in actual operation the Russian navy played a very secondary part during the war, in reality its undisputed supremacy governed the operations and shaped their course from start to finish.

Prussia, indeed, was not a maritime power, and her great military instructor, Clausewitz, had regarded war and land

fighting as almost synonymous. And yet, by the irony of fate, before three years had passed after the publication of Moltke's study on the Russians in Bulgaria and Rumelia, Prussia had to accept the humiliation of defeat at the hands of a third-rate Power which had command of the sea and knew how to use it.



## CHAPTER VIII

### PRUSSIA AND THE PRUSSIAN ARMY DURING MOLTKE'S EARLY MANHOOD

MOLTKE'S service in the East was professionally a stroke of good fortune, for he had entered the Prussian army at an unfavourable epoch. Following the first fourteen years of the century, during which Europe was ruled by force of arms, there succeeded the long period from 1814 to 1848, in which it was governed by diplomacy—or, more strictly speaking, by an Austrian diplomat, Metternich. It was a period, however, which provided the makings of a war, a war for the leadership in Germany. The Holy Roman Empire, after a thousand years of life, had been stricken to death at Austerlitz, but though the hoary anachronism had collapsed, unhonoured and unsung, German racial feeling remained. Some bond, or union, or confederation was inevitable, and no less inevitable was the issue whether Prussia or Austria was to be the leader in it.

The Congress of Vienna in 1815 had rewarded Prussia with considerable territorial compensation, chiefly in Western Germany. The significance to Prussia of this great new acquisition on either bank of the Rhine was, from a military point of view, very great. Geographically, it brought her into immediate contact with France; it made her the guardian of the middle Rhine, and in a sense the protector of Western Germany, a position hitherto held by Austria. Further, there was the great military asset furnished by the industrial and economic resources of Westphalia. But though Prussia was to leave the Congress with an increase of potential military power she was beaten by Austria when it came to the question of the new constitution of Germany.

The struggles of the Napoleonic period had fed the desire of the Germans for reunion, but there was one serious obstacle to its fulfilment. That obstacle was the absolute sovereignty which Napoleon—at the expense of the Emperor—had given to the kings he had created in Germany. These kings, freed from their traditional subordination to the Emperor, and now freed, too, from the taskmaster who had elevated them, were exceedingly loth to part with their unexpected independence. The problem was a formidable one, and the two diplomatic solvers from Prussia and Austria, in the persons of Stein and Metternich, proposed solutions diametrically opposed. The more liberal Stein bewailed the prospect of fifteen millions of Germans being handed over to the caprices of thirty-six despots, while the more reactionary Metternich protested that any attempt to sweep away the despots would infallibly throw them into the arms of France.

It was useless to think of breathing new life into the corpse of the Empire, and Stein, therefore, favoured the separation of North Germany from South Germany, with the formation from them of two strong Federal States, under Prussia and Austria respectively; but to this solution Metternich was inflexibly opposed. The aim of his policy was to make Austria supreme in Germany, and indeed in Europe, and he conceived that Austrian interests could best be served by a loose confederation of independent and co-equal sovereigns. After long deliberation and the consideration of rival schemes, the proposal of Metternich was finally adopted by the Congress. The Federal Act was signed on June 8, 1815, and the Germanic Confederation was formally placed under the guarantee of the signatory Powers.

The new Germanic Confederation was to comprise thirty-nine sovereign states and free cities, of which latter there were four, and the concerns of the Bund were to be managed by a Federal Diet at Frankfurt. In this Diet Austria was to preside. The most powerful members of the Bund were not entirely Germanic. Further, the whole of the kingdom of Prussia was not included in the Confederation, and the Empire of Austria was only represented for its German parts. The political problem was rendered more difficult by the peculiar character of the other component members.

Luxemburg, united to the ruling house of the new Netherlands kingdom, was a member ; the King of Denmark, as Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, was represented for Holstein but not for Schleswig, and Hanover was under the English crown. The Federal Diet was, in consequence, comprised of diplomatic representatives from states purely Germanic, and from others partially so ; and, regarded as an organic constitution, the Bund of 1815 had many glaring anomalies. Anomalous though it was, the Confederation was a complete triumph for Austria. Metternich had clearly realized that it was only by championing the rights of the minor princes that the ambition of the Hohenzollerns could be curbed and the lost authority of the Hapsburgs restored, and in this he had succeeded. Further, with the assent of confederated Germany and the sanction of European approval, Austria had been replaced in her immemorial position as head and leader of the German race. The tension which already existed between Prussia and Austria was now tightened into a rivalry only to be solved by a struggle to the death.

Though successful in one great issue, Austria within a few years made a profound blunder over an economic question. During the first half of the nineteenth century Germany was economically and commercially the most backward country in Western Europe, and in no country was industry less advanced than in Prussia. Her fiscal arrangements were extraordinarily complex ; sixty-seven different tariffs were in existence ; and her frontiers touched twenty-eight different states. The genius, however, of Maasen, an ardent disciple of Adam Smith, devised in 1818 a sound scheme on frankly anti-protectionist and free-trade lines. At first the change was confined to Prussia alone ; but in the following year there was the first modest step towards a Customs Union or *Zollverein*, and within ten years the whole of Germany, with one significant exception, was awake to the advantages of the policy initiated by Prussia.

That state was Austria. Towards the earlier stages of this remarkable development Austria manifested complete indifference. The importance of the *Zollverein* to Germany in general and to Prussia in particular can, however, hardly be exaggerated. By 1829 the northern and southern systems



had been united into a real Customs Union including 17 states with a population of 26,000,000. Its influence was by no means purely economic, for it brought the sentiment of German nationality out of the regions of hope and fancy into the one of positive and material interests. The general feeling in Germany towards the *Zollverein* was that it was the first step towards the Germanization of the people, while the important feature, as regards Prussia, was that it united the German states in bonds of mutual economic interest with Prussian leadership, and that it accustomed them to the prospect of the exclusion of Austria from the Germanic body. Within twenty years of the formation of the Confederation, Prussia had obtained a good start in the race for German hegemony.

The military no less than the political system of Prussia had undergone a marked development during the years of Moltke's youth and early manhood. Universal military service, which had originated in 1813 out of the need of the moment, and was intended at first to last only for the duration of the war, was made permanent by the law of September 3, 1814. Every Prussian capable of bearing arms was now bound to serve in the standing army from the age of 20 to 23, and for two years longer in the reserve. This was to be followed up by service in the first levy of the Landwehr till the age of 32, and in the second levy up to 39. Over and above these services was the Landsturm, composed of all males from 17 to 49 who were not included either in the Landwehr or the standing army. The reorganization of the army on these lines was the work of General Boyen, Minister of War, whose great aim was to effect a complete separation between the standing army and the Landwehr, so that they should, to a certain extent, exist as separate armies side by side. It was found, however, that the flow into the Landwehr was by no means sufficient, and hence originated the system of evolving a paper Landwehr by giving men a rapid pretence of training and enlisting them in the Landwehr forthwith. This paper force, however, had the weaknesses inherent in such bodies, and in the great manœuvres on the Rhine in 1819 Frederick William saw enough to warrant him setting aside Boyen's theory of the



Landwehr as an independent and reliable militia. A closer consideration between the Landwehr and the standing army was then arranged, but the hopes set upon this scheme were very imperfectly realized, for in the year 1830, when it became necessary to assemble troops for the protection of the eastern and western frontiers, certain grave deficiencies were revealed.

The balance of modern expert opinion inclines to the belief that the Prussian army was not war-ready; but Moltke's opinion formed at the same time was of a different nature. Writing to his mother under the date of Christmas Eve, 1830, he states: "Not a state in Europe—with the possible exception of Austria—can at this moment put as many men into the field as Prussia. Without doubt or exaggeration Prussia is the only Power which, besides having an army well supplied and complete in every detail, is so secure of the feeling of the people as to be able to conduct a war on the offensive." It is significant to note that Bismarck in his *Reminiscences* makes a similar statement. Writing of 1830 he said: "Beyond doubt the strongest state and possibly the only one capable of waging war in Europe was Prussia." This much, however, must be said for modern opinion; the deficiency of the Landwehr was so marked as to compel the reduction of service in the standing army from three to two years. Though introduced as a "temporary" measure to build up a trained second line, it was found necessary to maintain the regulation in force for more than twenty years.

As for the officer corps of the Prussian army during the first portion of the nineteenth century, it had shared in the reaction against the ideas of the years of regeneration. Scharnhorst's reform, which had opened a military career to officers of middle class origin, had no appreciable effect. The limitation fixed on the Prussian army by Napoleon from 1808 to 1812 left practically no opening for this new blood, although the triumph of the Allies and the increase in Prussian territory did for a time completely alter this state of affairs. The old army officers were then completely snowed under by the influx of a new class, and between the two no real fusion was possible. The Junkers, haughty and

often of small means, kept themselves aloof from their bourgeois comrades, and this impoverished exclusiveness developed a type of young officer of a reserved and, indeed, sometimes even of boorish and *farouche* manners. The school was an austere one, but it brought forth a Moltke and a Roon.

The increasing staleness and inactivity which characterize the long years of peace affected the officer class in particular. After the rapid advancement of comparatively young men in the War of Liberation, promotion slowed down until the seniority of regimental officers was almost on a par with the state of things in the year of Jena. Manœuvres became increasingly conventional, and routine once more exercised its cramping influence. The army was, however, by no means insignificant so far as numbers went, for the regular army in 1832 totalled some 165,000 of all ranks, and the Landwehr and Landsturm could place almost the same number in the field. Nevertheless, officers developed into superior drill sergeants, possessing little knowledge of the theory and none of the practice of war. By 1830 it was becoming clear, and the mobilization of 1830 startlingly emphasized the fact, that the future of the army lay in the hands of the rising generation. It happened that the stagnation in the military profession chilled the enthusiasm of the bourgeois officer element, and the old families once again became the chief recruiting-ground of the officer corps. Through them the spirit of Junkerism permeated the army anew, and the officer corps took on again its aristocratic aspect. It was from this generation, differing so widely from that expected to arise after 1813, that were produced the leaders of 1866 and 1870.

It was in this period of stagnation that there was given to the world by a Prussian writer a treatise on war which profoundly affected Prussian military thought, not only in Moltke's era, but down to the great war of 1914. Carl von Clausewitz had lived through the era which began with Valmy, included Jena and Leipzig, and terminated with Waterloo. His duties had implied general staff and administrative appointments of extraordinary range and significance, while his mind had been broadened and de-Prussianized by

service in an allied army—that of Russia. To these advantages he brought a reflective mind and a powerful pen, and from these grew his classic work *On War*.

He prepared himself for his work of writing a theory of war by a series of military histories, but though his work is theoretical it discounts any rigid adherence to what may be called geometrical strategy, and gives full weight to the human factors—courage, the will to win, and what may be described as the human equation. Just before his death he declared that his life's work had taught him two elementary but profound truths—the fact that war is but the continuation of policy, from which the corollary can be deduced that strategy must be in harmony with politics, and, secondly, that war, logically waged, must aim at the annihilation of the enemy's armed forces. The title heading of his first chapter is a question "What is War?" and his reply is concise and to the point. "War is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will." He insists on the necessity of crushing the enemy; for until the enemy is crushed he may always turn the tables on his opponent. Clausewitz, therefore, deprecated in the strongest manner the sentiment of benevolence in war, and described it as the worst of errors, which must be exterminated at all costs. Everywhere he insisted on the absolute and essential need of reducing the enemy to complete submission. This factor of war has come to be so clearly recognized that the energy and force with which Clausewitz sets it forth seem somewhat uncalled for now. But Clausewitz had witnessed a period of history where this essential had been for a time completely lost sight of. He had seen the "sickly - artistic" conception of war in which feeble manœuvre had been exalted to pride of place, and where success in placing a fordable stream between two armies was esteemed a triumph for the commander who had brought about such results. Frederick had, it is true, manœuvred—but to an end; his successors made manœuvre the end itself. Clausewitz feared that even Jena might be forgotten.

He came to the conclusion that where the deep feelings of one nation are stirred in a dispute with another, the nation so stirred will throw its whole energy into the struggle, and



utilize all its resources to the end desired. In simpler language, when a state is fighting for what it believes to be its existence it will fight to the last man and the last shilling, and Clausewitz foresaw the need of the best intelligence, trained to the highest capacity and unfettered by external control, in the conduct of operations. It was with these doctrines that not only Moltke, but the Prussian staff, and even the whole Prussian army were imbued.

Except for the consolidation of the reforms of Scharnhorst and the appearance in 1832 of Clausewitz's classic, the years of Moltke's early manhood were marked by no event of outstanding military importance. Politically, however, they formed a period of peculiar significance. The main feature of it was the steady growth of nationalism in Europe, and not least in Germany ; in Prussia the national feeling was intense, and had as its goal the ultimate hegemony of the Confederation. But although the national feeling in Prussia was diffused, and, therefore, democratic in its widest sense, the same period is remarkable for the successful repression of democracy in Prussia and a repression either by the threat, or actual employment, of disciplined military force. It might be thought that the growth of national feeling, unless accompanied *pari passu* by the realization of democratic ideals, would be doomed to sterility. The history of Prussia in the nineteenth century was, however, to prove that exactly the opposite was the case. Although the victories of Moltke would place him easily among the great captains of military history, his claim to be counted among the Makers of the Nineteenth Century rests on a wider basis. It was that he was identified with that machine of statesmanship which was to show that national ideals may be won under a system of government autocratic, disciplinary, and severely militarist in form. The one essential which democracy demands from such a system is military success. And that success the genius of Moltke was able to provide.

## CHAPTER IX

### MOLTKE'S MARRIAGE—THE YEAR 1848—PRUSSIA'S SUBMISSION TO AUSTRIA—THE WAR WITH DENMARK

MOLTKE had once said to his younger sister Augusta, "Marriage is a lottery, nobody knows what he will draw. If ever I should marry, I should like to choose a girl brought up by you." The wish was to be fulfilled. Since 1834 Augusta von Moltke had been married to an Englishman, John Heyliger Burt of Colton House, Staffordshire, an owner of estates in the West Indies. Burt was at the time a widower with three children by his first wife, Marie *née* von Staffeldt, and after his second marriage he settled in Schleswig, later in the little town of Itzehoe in Holstein. Of the children his only son died young, and of two daughters, the younger, Bertha Marie Wilhelmine, was born at Kiel on April 5, 1826. She was only five years old when she lost her mother and eight when her father married again, so that her bringing up was almost entirely at the hands of her step-mother, Helmuth von Moltke's sister.

The letters which von Moltke had sent from the East had been a source of great interest to the family circle, and Marie Burt had followed his career with girlish enthusiasm. In 1839 he came himself—a tall, stern Othello, to the little Desdemona just in her teens—a source of awe, with his glittering Turkish Star and the order *Pour le Mérite*, which had been conferred upon him in the unusual rank of captain. Two years later he returned for a more eventful visit a tall, spare, soldierly figure, of a serious demeanour, but not without a certain sly humour, and looking perhaps older than his forty years. Though hardly more than a child when he had last seen her, Marie Burt had haunted

his fancy during his absence, and on his return he opened his heart to the young girl. They were betrothed, though not without an honourable anxiety on the part of Moltke, who drew his young niece's attention to his reserved disposition, the aftermath of a joyless childhood. Marie Burt's reply throws an interesting sidelight upon the Moltke of forty-one. "I knew well," she said, "that all the Moltkes are quiet and reserved. You often show a restraint which some people call hauteur. I know that you possess a rich store of gentleness and nobility of heart rarely found in a man. And even among women there are few who possess a warmer heart or deeper sympathy."

A further glimpse of Moltke at the time is afforded by the letters he wrote to his betrothed during their courtship :

"Dearest Marie," he writes in one, "if to-night after nine o'clock you will look towards the south you will see a beautiful star rise above the horizon, a star which my poor mother often used to admire. I never see it without thinking of her, and I believe it is my lucky star."

And in another, more personal in tone, the same vein of sentiment is disclosed :

The moon is shining outside my window. You, too, must see it. Is it, perhaps, a mirror? I see in it your dear features, your nut-brown eyes, and the corner of your laughing lips! Near it shines the beautiful star of which I have spoken to you. Many a time on the far plains of Asia, after a burning day, has it risen at evening from the dusk with its southern brightness, and shone so tenderly as if to say, "Take comfort, forget your sorrows, some day you will find a heart to love you." Dear Marie I have found such a heart in you.

More practical, but no less tender in tone, is another paragraph from the latter of these two epistles. Marie Burt had asked in one of hers whether "it would be quite the same to you if I dance?" To this straightforward question, which to a lover of Moltke's age might have caused "the least little touch of spleen," he replied with an affectionate magnanimity, and with the whimsical touch so characteristic of him :



"I wish," he says, "particularly that you should dance—only not with people who wear tight boots. God forbid that I should efface youthful days from your life. You will be pretty and young for many years to come, and will, I hope, enjoy all the pleasures the world holds for one like you. . . . I trust you will always be able to return gladly from all the brilliantly lighted halls to your own little home, and always be able to cherish the feeling that no one loves you more dearly than the old 'bear' at home."

They were married at Itzehoe on April 20, 1842, on the day that Moltke became a major, and left soon for Berlin, where they passed the first years of their married life. In spite of the disparity in age, and although the union was not blessed with children, the marriage was the prelude of twenty-six years of unclouded happiness. Their life at first was very retired, and they associated with very few families, but by and by Moltke's official connection with Prince Charles led to his wife's presentation at court, where the kindness which the royal family had always shown Moltke was extended to her. Marie von Moltke entered fully into the gaities of the court festivities, and her physical activity enabled her to enjoy long rides with her husband, during which she was mounted on the faithful charger which had borne her husband away from the *débâcle* at Nisib. She was, however, always happiest in her home, when her husband would read to her aloud, or where she would sit quietly at his side whilst he was at work. Hardly an evening passed without their reading together a chapter from the Bible.

Life at Berlin in the early forties possessed little of particular military interest, and Moltke's active brain turned to the new factor of railways. He had saved £1500 while in Turkey, and on his return had invested it in the Hamburg-Berlin railway, a new venture, of which he became a director. In 1843 he wrote an essay on the principles of laying out and working a railway, which reveals a clear grasp of railway technicalities and a business-like brain. It was not long before he grasped the strategic possibilities held out by an efficient railway system, and in a letter to his brother Ludwig of April 13, 1844, he alludes with satis-

faction to the progress which Germany was making as compared with France : " While the French Chambers are still engaged discussing the matter, we have laid down three hundred miles of railway, and are working at two hundred more," a remark made, curiously enough, almost at the time when the voice of Prince Louis Napoleon was crying in the wilderness as to the poor results of the railway system of France as compared with that of Prussia.

In the autumn of 1845 Moltke was unexpectedly nominated personal aide-de-camp to Prince Henry of Prussia (brother to King Frederick William III.), who resided in Rome. The Prince, a man of high education and a profound knowledge of European affairs, had become a Roman Catholic, and was spending his declining years at Rome, the victim of an incurable malady. Accompanied by his wife and his brother Ludwig, Moltke set out on November 14, reaching Rome a month later. There Moltke lived for some months, devoting his ample leisure—for his duties were but nominal—to a study of Roman antiquities and to his old practice of surveying. The latter hobby led later to the publication of what was at the time the best map of the Eternal City. It was destined to be of military use, for in 1849, when Rome, having risen in revolt against Pius IX., was attacked by a French army under Oudinot, and while Garibaldi was defending the city bravely, Moltke sent his plan of the environs of Rome to Alexander von Humboldt, requesting him to present it to Frederick William IV., so that His Majesty might be able to follow the operations in which he was much interested.

In 1846 Prince Henry of Prussia died. Moltke went to Berlin to convey the news to the King, and was instructed to return to Rome to superintend the removal of the body to the Prussian capital. A corvette was detailed for the purpose, but, during a stormy passage to Gibraltar, Moltke—who was always an extraordinarily bad sailor—suffered so terribly that the captain refused to be responsible for him, and persuaded him to disembark. He therefore travelled overland through Spain and France and Germany, reaching Hamburg ten days before the vessel carrying the body for which he was responsible. Moltke was then

appointed to the staff of the VIIIth Corps at Coblenz, and it seemed to him as if his military career was now nearing its close. He hoped merely to be made chief of the staff of a corps, a step which would probably come within a few years. "I do not want to rise higher, and shall then retire," he wrote to one of his brothers. Family life appealed to him strongly, and in the same letter, dated October 1847, he alludes affectionately to "my little wife my greatest joy." Warm-hearted and affectionate by nature as Moltke was, in spite of his outward reserve, the absence of children was a real grief to him. "I do not," he once wrote, "know that I ever wished any other gift of Fortune."

The great upheaval of 1848, however, dispelled these dreams of retirement. That year and the two that followed were to exercise a profound influence on Prussia, and were characterized by political and military events which, complicated and intricate though they were, cannot be passed by. The political movements were two—a constitutional movement in Prussia and the national movement in Germany, while the military event was the war of 1848 between Prussia and Denmark. These three outstanding occurrences were in practice closely intermingled, and led directly to the wars of 1864 and 1866 and indirectly to the greater war of 1870-71—wars in all of which Moltke took part, and in two of which he was the bringer of triumph.

On February 27, 1848, when the news of the Parisian revolution began to reach Germany, for the moment it seemed as if the days of autocratic government were numbered in Prussia and the triumph of democracy was assured. By the unfortunate misunderstanding of an order to the troops, by which Berlin was left to the mercy of the mob, Frederick William was forced to undergo personal humiliation, to summon a Constituent Assembly, and to submit to it a programme of constitutional reform. But there was one feature of the upheaval which was to have a profound effect on Prussia's future, and to shape the scheme of government by which she was to be ruled. Unlike the French soldiery in 1789 the Prussian army never wavered, but remained staunch and unshaken in its loyalty to the crown. It was this firmness which emboldened the King



to repudiate the new constitution and to rely on bayonets and soldiers ; before the end of the year the assembly was dispersed by force of arms, and the city placed under martial law. The constitutional charter which was immediately promulgated by Royal Edict, and eventually—though not without a bitter struggle—accepted by the chambers, was far different from that which the revolutionaries of 1848 had risen for. It was anti-democratic and monarchical. The system of suffrage secured representation for property as well as numbers. The whole constitution presupposed the absolute supremacy of the crown, and the rights of the crown over the army were expressly guaranteed. It was the insistence on this latter provision which enabled the military party eleven years later to force through the scheme of army reform, without which the wars against Austria and France could not have been won.

This particularist struggle in Prussia in reality formed part of the wide issue of the movement for German national unity—a movement of especial interest, in that it marked a stage in the Prusso-Austrian struggle which was to be fought out by force of arms in 1866. The essence of the movement was that not only in Prussia, but outside, the liberalism which burst forth in the revolutionary months of 1848 looked to a closer union of Germany under the leadership of Prussia, at the expense of Austria. The first declared symptom of this desire came from Prussia itself, when on March 21 took place the formal reconciliation of the King of Prussia and the citizens of Berlin. But though Frederick William could ride through the streets wearing the red, black, and gold emblematic of German unity, and saluted by the crowd as Emperor of Germany, his absolutist convictions revolted against the idea of receiving the imperial power from the hands of the people whose authority he despised. The desire for national unity which extended far beyond the borders of Prussia was, however, not to be so easily evaded. The Federal Diet, which since 1815 had been the mouthpiece of the reactionary Metternich, bowed before the storm of March 1848. In the short-lived Frankfort Parliament which took its place, the German question was the real point of issue. The “great Germans” were all for the

inclusion of all the non-German provinces of Austria, while the "little Germans" insisted that the inclusion of any part of Austria would be a fatal bar to German unity. Unfortunately for Prussia, the "little Germans" carried the day, and on March 28, 1849, Frederick William IV. was "elected" German Emperor.

The position of the King of Prussia at this fateful moment of German history was embarrassing in the extreme. Intensely anti-democratic in feeling and generally loyal to Hapsburg tradition, it was natural that he should experience considerable reluctance in accepting the Imperial crown offered him by a majority of middle-class doctrinaires. But the real and formidable obstacle to yielding to the wishes of a representative assembly of Germans was the unmistakable hostility of Austria. Even before the election as emperor had been formally voted, Schwarzenberg had protested in the most positive manner against the subordination of his sovereign to a supreme power centred in any other German prince. It could hardly be doubted but that the acceptance by the King of Prussia of the headship of Germany would mean war. And even though the Prussian army had shown a staunch devotion to the royal house, Frederick William had sufficient military knowledge to grasp the fact that it was not in a condition to enter upon a campaign with a first-class power. Had the crisis come earlier, and had the Frankfort Parliament not wasted six precious months in academic discussion, Austria might have been ignored. For what with risings in Lombardy, Venetia, Bohemia, Hungary, and her own capital, it had looked for a time as if she could never stand up to Prussia in the struggle for pride of place in Germany.

But by March 28, 1849, the danger to Austria had largely passed away. Novara had been fought and won; revolution had been stamped out in Vienna, and though Austrian armies were still engaged in Hungary, their ultimate success could be confidently looked for. A youthful emperor had succeeded the feeble Ferdinand, and behind him stood the powerful Tsar, whose immense armies were soon to aid in suppressing the democratic outbreak in Hungary. If Frederick William were to accept the Imperial crown, he

must pit the unready Prussian armies against the tried soldiers of Austria, flushed with recent victories. It was this factor which probably decided the issue when on April 3, 1849, he refused the crown, and the unity of Germany was postponed.

The triumph of Austria was complete. But it was not enough for Schwarzenberg that Prussia had stood aside when the headship of a united Germany had been almost thrust upon her. She was to be reduced to her former position of unmistakable inferiority to Austria, and, as a Power, was to be humiliated, if not destroyed. The only test by which the problem could be solved was that of war, and Schwarzenberg did not shrink from it. When trouble broke out between the reactionary elector of Hesse-Cassel and his revolting subjects in 1850, it looked as if the issue could be forced, for the Elector appealed to the Federal Diet, in which Austrian influence was supreme and the subjects looked to Prussia. But the Tsar placed himself unmistakably on the side of Austria. Manteuffel whispered into Frederick William's ear that the Prussian army could not withstand the hardy and well-tried soldiers of Austria. Schwarzenberg met the Prussian Minister at Olmütz to arrange all the differences between the two Powers. And Prussia crept back to her second place in the fold of the Germanic Confederation.

Thus from the political point of view, the stormy period which broke out in 1848 had ended with the humiliation of Prussia, and her definite subordination to her rival Austria ; and the sense of inferiority was increased by the military setback she had received elsewhere at the hands of a third-rate Power. The war with Denmark closed with the marked discomfiture of Prussia. The origin of that contest lies buried in one of the most difficult and complicated questions of European history—that of Schleswig-Holstein, and it might be passed by without remark were it not—as has been truly said—that the conflicts of 1864 and 1866 can no more be understood without a knowledge of that of 1848, than the siege of Troy can be understood without a knowledge of the abduction of Helen. To use Moltke's words it was "the first link of a chain which led to Nicolsburg and Versailles."



As far back as 1460 the two duchies had been united to the kingdom of Denmark ; Holstein, however, had also formed part of the Holy Roman Empire though Schleswig had not ; both duchies contained large numbers of inhabitants of German origin who were discontented with their lot ; and the Salic law prevailed both in Schleswig and Holstein, but not in Denmark. These ingredients of trouble when thrown into the seething pot of 1848 soon boiled into war. Several German monarchs, anxious to find a safety-valve, determined to espouse the popular cause of Schleswig-Holstein. The Kings of Prussia and Hanover sent each a division, and a little later the Diet of the German Confederation likewise declared war on Denmark.

Into the details of the struggle, although it forms a study of exceptional interest, it is not necessary to go. The salient fact was that the Danes had a fleet while the Germans had practically none, and the Danes could move their troops by sea when and where they chose, besides possessing the ability—which they used to the full—of exerting a strict blockade of Prussia's ports. By the beginning of August the difficulties of the campaign had been brought home to the Prussian general von Wrangel. In a doleful despatch to the Frankfurt Parliament he wrote :

To bring about a peace something more than mere occupation of the enemy's territory is required. The destruction of his army and war material is necessary, and of that, so far as my experience goes, there is no chance. The enemy will continue to avoid battle and to withdraw to the islands under the protection of his ships, and to attack these islands is impossible for a land Power however strong it may be . . . only by the assistance of an allied fleet will it be possible to compel the enemy to accept battle and to bring about a peace.

The result of the possession by Denmark of islands to which, and of a fleet by which, troops could be transferred at will, brought it about that, although Prussia was the prime mover in the attack on Denmark, by the winter of 1849 she was glad to accept a temporary armistice. When the campaign was renewed the numerical inferiority of the Danes on land seemed, for the moment, to promise certain victory to Prussia and her allies, but by turning maritime command

to most brilliant account the siege of Fredericia was raised by the Danes, and the Germans were completely defeated. By 1850 the insurgents, abandoned by their German allies, who were intimidated by the attitude of Russia and Austria, laid down their arms. Denmark issued triumphant from the struggle, and had beaten off the onset of a great military Power in two successive campaigns. The Prussia which had risen like a phoenix from the ashes of Jena, and into whose military decay Scharnhorst and Clausewitz had breathed new life, had been made to seem lath and plaster painted to look like iron.

The political and military humiliation of Prussia had succeeded the outburst of Prussian liberalism; and the liberals had failed chiefly because they had steeped themselves in the error that national aspirations can be won by mere discussion, and without the support of powerful armed forces. That Moltke definitely ranged himself on the conservative and militarist side is clear from his letters. "The poor Fatherland!" he writes mournfully to his brother Adolf in August 1848, "the better part of the nation are silent, the scum come to the top and govern. . . . It must all end in war, and it is some comfort to think that the first gunshot will put an end to all these praters." A year later, to the same correspondent, he gives as his conviction, "democracy is about the worst stuff for any one to lean on." But the staunchness and loyalty of the army fills him with satisfaction and pride—"the army which stands alone spotless and pure, the last and only safeguard of order," and later in the same letter, "we have now 40,000 men in and round Berlin; there lies the centre of gravity of the German question. A strong Prussian Government and then German unity can be achieved by Prussia. Power now lies at Berlin with a full right to use it. . . . As regards my appointment here, I am chief of the staff of the IVth Corps. I have plenty to do, for democracy is moving here, too. But we step in firmly with our splendid soldiery. The insurgent towns are kept in order by mobilized columns, whole troops of armed citizens and rifle clubs are disarmed, the ringleaders captured, and the rebels plainly taught that the law still has the upper hand." Later in the same fateful 1848, the con-

servatism of the professional soldier again declares itself. "There is no choice but reaction or anarchy. We are, it is certain, at a serious crisis. It has come to a refusal to pay taxes. The next step will be a red republic. . . . Good faith, discipline, and order seem now only to be found in the army and in the official class, on whom, of course, the press pours out the vials of its wrath."

Moltke felt keenly the disgrace of Olmütz, though it is possible that the shame of the surrender led him to take too roseate a view of what would have been the result had the question been fought out by war. As late as August 1850 he did not believe that war would ensue, but before the end of the year the tension caused by the presence of Federal and Prussian troops in Hesse brought forth the wise epigram, "The peace of Europe no longer depends on the conferences of Ministers, but on the action of a patrol of Hussars." On February 25, 1851, he poured out his feelings to Adolf von Moltke as follows :

I cannot bear to write of politics ; the unworthy part we are being made to play cannot last much longer. As yet I have never really believed war would come, but now I think we must have it in a year. A more disgraceful peace was never signed. And such an army as we had collected ! For twenty-four weeks the IVth Corps was mobilized and brought out of all the garrisons. And such troops ! If only Frederick the Great had had such men ! Thirty millions (of thalers) are gone for a demonstration, and to accept any and every condition. But the worst government cannot ruin this nation. Prussia will yet stand at the head of Germany. . . . In Holstein for the moment all is lost, but the question must be reopened. Still it must be true that a more pitiable nation than the Germans does not exist on earth. Mobilization and demobilization have given me much to do, but the result was satisfactory ; all that was needed was the will to make use of it, if not indeed to fight all Europe—for our diplomacy had brought us to that—at any rate to negotiate with arms in our hands. But we seem to have called out all the strength of the state merely to submit to humiliating conditions. Dissatisfaction is universal and very serious. If victory over democracy bears such fruit we had almost better conjure it into life again. But this will not be necessary.

The humiliating end to the contest with Denmark was another item in the long account to be settled with Austria,



and that war was, later, deeply studied by Moltke when he was Chief of the Staff. All through the year 1862 he was busily engaged upon a history of the war, a task for which his complete command of Danish peculiarly fitted him, especially in view of the fact that by that time an account published by the Danish staff was at his disposal. He continued to work at his manuscript for the next fifteen years, and eventually the work was published in 1893, by the Historical Section of the German Great General Staff. The story of the war is told with admirable lucidity, but the volume is without any marked literary grace, and the concise and staccato style makes it read at times like a war diary. The history terminates with the victory of the Danes in front of Fredericia, and the armistice which followed in July 1849, so that the final triumph of the Danes is not touched upon. A disappointing feature of the book is the absence of a wide critical survey of the strategic aspect of the war ; there are not many cases where a weak state has beaten off the onset of a great military combination in two successive campaigns ; and the manner in which maritime supremacy compensated for military inferiority unfortunately receives very little notice. The actual *Betrachtungen* of the volume fill merely two pages of the four hundred of which it is made up. Naturally such a brief survey leaves the maritime question almost untouched. That question, however, does not escape notice altogether, for Moltke wrote *Die Dänen kämpften eben mit zwei Waffen, zu Lande und zur See, die Deutschen nur mit der einen*. The words are few, but they are almost a history in themselves.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SECOND EMPIRE—MOLTKE'S VISITS TO ENGLAND, RUSSIA, AND FRANCE

By 1853 the political situation of Europe was further complicated by events in France, and to Moltke the possibility of a great European war seemed likely. Never friendly to France, he had a really violent antipathy to the Second Empire. In a letter to his brother Adolf, written on January 23, 1853, he alludes to the chance of a general war, "which Louis Napoleon will probably provide within a few years."

"His Empire," Moltke goes on to say, "assumes more and more the character of a magnificent swindle. His marriage with this Spaniard completely excludes him from admission into the list of legitimate royal families; and the London Stock Exchange, by merely raising the rate of exchange, can overthrow his whole system of finance. The French must grow weary of this adventurer, who will find it harder to remain an emperor than to have become one. He can scarcely hold his place without some victories; and whether he is himself a general, and a general on the lines of his uncle, remains to be proved. But he must fight and win his own battles, or his general will be emperor."

The war which Moltke foresaw brought him, however, no opportunity. In the Eastern question Frederick William IV. devoted all his energies to keeping Prussia out of the struggle, so that while France and England were wrestling with Russia, while Turkey was bravely doing her share, while Austria was occupying the Danubian principalities, and Sardinia had sent an army to the Crimea, Prussia stood aloof, and her inaction made her sink low in the estimation of the world. Moltke thought that the German Powers were

“playing a very poor game.” “Any fresh increase of Russian power is to them evidently a serious peril, and yet they are leaving to the Western Powers the task of snatching the chestnuts out of the fire. This will be remembered against us, and will not improve the esteem in which we are held by Europe.”

Instead of service in the field it was an era of court life which now opened for Moltke. On September 1, 1855, he was appointed First Adjutant to Prince Frederick William, nephew of the King of Prussia, and afterwards the Emperor Frederick III., and three weeks later he received orders to proceed to Scotland to join the Prince, who was on a visit to the English royal family at Balmoral. Moltke was always a good correspondent, and his letters to his wife give an interesting record of the impressions made on him by Victorian Britain. His reminiscences begin from the moment he set foot on English soil. The Lord Warden Hotel at Dover impressed him immensely, but the view of the Crystal Palace, seen from the train, “surpassed all conception.” The House of Commons struck him as surprisingly inadequate in accommodation, while the “ludicrous comradeship of the Apostles with English statesmen and generals” in St. Paul’s Cathedral offended his simple taste. The price of wine in England startled him, but there was a glorious compensation in the English beer, “so good that I have not felt inclined to incur the expense of anything else.” It is somewhat surprising to read that Moltke considered second class on German railways superior to the first-class accommodation on the lines in England.

The simplicity of court life at Balmoral—and it must be confessed the damp climate as well—considerably impressed the traveller, and he gives his wife a long description of his experiences at the castle. The absence of affectation was particularly and more than once remarked on. Highland costume—worn by the Prince Consort at dinner—interested him greatly, and he takes the trouble to inform his wife that the Prince’s legs were not enclosed in tights, but were really bare. Leaving Scotland, Moltke made a tour through England, visiting Kenilworth, Warwick, and Windsor Castles, but the description of them is not more detailed than that



of the Crystal Palace, where he spent a whole day. The iron of Victorian England clearly entered deep in Moltke's soul, and its somewhat depressing influence is unmistakably reflected in his letters. The English climate and the London Sunday appalled him. The whimsical humour so conspicuous in the correspondence of his earlier days has almost entirely disappeared, and it must be confessed that his letters make somewhat dreary reading. The opportunity granted Moltke of witnessing a foreign capital and a foreign court must have given his dry humour an infinity of subjects on which to touch, but he has made but poor use of it. With accurate observation and with shrewd comment his letters are replete, but of the lighter touches, those "agreeable levities"—so dear to Elia—"which, though contemptible in bulk, are the twinkling corpuscula which should indicate a right friendly epistle" there is, unfortunately, but little trace.

Early in the following year Moltke returned to England, and his correspondence with his wife continued as before. The chief interest in this series is contained in Moltke's impressions of military spectacles in England. A ceremonial parade on the Horse Guards parade "eloquently betrayed the English love of pageantry." The laying of the first stone of Wellington College was followed by a review of which Moltke says :

Twelve thousand men stood in line ; five thousand Guards and infantry of the line ; the rest militia who will be discharged to-morrow. The riflemen who marched past in black uniform had already one dead and two wounded lying on the parade ground. The march-past from our point of view was very indifferent. The whole affair was rather a firework than a manœuvre.

A few days later he attended a review by the Queen of the troops at Aldershot, which must have been a somewhat remarkable sight.

There was a regiment of Dragoon Guards in scarlet and helmets, very fine bearded men, all the horses had been in the Crimea ; two regiments of Hussars (all Germans). Of the infantry there was a battalion of militia, one Swiss, two English, and five German regiments.

The Teutonic contingent doubtless formed the German Legion, which had been raised by voluntary enlistment for service in the Crimea, and was paraded as a compliment to the nationality of the visitors.

The engagement of Prince Frederick William to the Princess Royal naturally led to a succession of visits of the former to Great Britain, and both in 1857 and 1858 Moltke was again in attendance, on the latter occasion for the royal wedding. His letters to his wife are much in the same strain as before, and various topics of English social life are dealt with. Taken as a whole, his correspondence during the period of his four visits is of considerable interest, but it is chiefly the interest excited by the manner in which the social system of our country struck an intelligent and observant visitor. As literary efforts, it may be confessed at once that the standard reached is by no means exceptional. His letters are clear, sober, informative, and voluminous, but they lack imagination and descriptive power, and are almost totally devoid of humour. The outstanding feature of them is, perhaps, a thoroughness of detail and a certain patient precision in marshalling fact after fact, combined with a cultured orderliness in putting his impressions on paper.

The sequence of these English visits had been interrupted by a brief sojourn in Russia. In July 1856 the prince had been delegated to represent the King of Prussia at the coronation of the Emperor Alexander II., and Moltke formed one of his suite. Moscow as a city particularly impressed Moltke, but the Russian people brought him to earth, and he came firmly to the conclusion that it was absolutely necessary for the Russians to have a master. He considered that the Russian, under good officers, made one of the most obedient and devoted of soldiers, and he quotes instances of Russian soldiers who at inundations and fires preferred to perish miserably at their posts rather than desert them without express orders to do so. The corruption of Russian officials naturally comes in for some scathing remarks from a critic like Moltke, upright and conscientious almost to a fault. The letters which Moltke wrote from Russia to his wife were collected and published in 1877, and are well

worthy of perusal, since his position enabled him to travel to the important centres of Russia, and the works he had published on the Russo-Turkish campaign of 1828-29 ensured a favourable reception for him in Russian society. In descriptive power they are far in advance of his letters from England.

In December of the same year Moltke was in attendance on Prince Frederick William during a state visit to Paris to the court of Napoleon III., fresh from the triumphs of the Crimea. During the visit, Moltke was all eyes and ears for the Empire which three years ago he had described as a "magnificent swindle," and his letters are full of references to the Emperor and his courts. A striking description is contained in one of them :

I quite thought that Louis Napoleon was taller—he looks better on horseback than on foot. I was struck by the peculiar immobility of his countenance, and, I had almost said, the lacklustre look in his eye. He has a good-natured kindly smile, which is anything but Napoleonic. He sits generally in a position of quiet repose, with his head slightly on one side, and it is perhaps just this repose which, never forsaking him in a serious emergency, so impresses his excitable subjects. Events have shown that this is no apathy but the outcome of a thoughtful mind and a firm will. In society he is not imposing, and in conversation he seems even slightly embarrassed. He is all an emperor, but never a king.

The Empress Eugenie, then thirty years old, made an agreeable impression on Moltke, but her remark upon her visitor is more worth quoting than his description of her :

"A general called Moltke or some such name," she wrote to one of her intimates, "is on attendance on the prince ; this gentleman who talks but little is nothing but a dreamer ; nevertheless he is always interesting, and surprises one by his apt remarks. The Germans are an imposing race. Louis says they are the race of the future. Bah !"



## CHAPTER XI

### APPOINTMENT AS CHIEF OF THE STAFF

It was during this phase of Moltke's life, marked chiefly by court ceremonial and official visits, that he succeeded to the highest position in the army. With the death of Lieutenant-General von Reyher in 1857 the office of Chief of the Staff fell vacant, and Moltke was appointed provisionally to carry on the duties, being confirmed in the position in September of the following year.

The news of his great promotion reached him at the close of the Fifth and Sixth Corps manœuvres, and was announced to his wife with characteristic simplicity :

While on the battlefield at the close of the last day's doings, Waldersee was promoted by the prince in the name of the King to the position of general. I, too, received a blue letter :

I very gladly take the opportunity at the close of the general practices of the Fifth and Sixth Corps to give you a proof of my entire satisfaction with your services by promoting you to the post of Chief of the General Staff of the Army.

By order of his Majesty the King

(Sgd.) PRINCE OF PRUSSIA.

LIEGNITZ, *18th September* 1858.

In consequence of this I shall wear again the uniform of the staff. To-day I had my first conference with my officers. To-morrow is a holiday, and then we start on our staff ride. There is a very neat little theatre here, light and pleasantly arranged. My rheumatism went almost as quickly as it came.

In the period which succeeded the peace of 1815 the

status of the Prussian General Staff had been sharply defined, and when Müffling was appointed to its head in 1821, its subordination to the Ministry of War was brought to a close. By the new arrangement the Chief of the Staff was made definitely responsible to the King for the training of the army, its direction in war, and for the preparation of plans of campaign, while the duties of the Minister of War were confined practically to the maintenance and administration of the forces. Curiously enough the Staff College, known at the time as the War School—later in 1859 the title was changed to that of War Academy—was in the department not of the Chief of the Staff but of the Inspector-General of Military Education, and it was not until 1872 that a reversion was made to the principle of Scharnhorst's time, and the institution once more came under its obvious head.

Although the nominal leadership of the army in war was, by law, the prerogative of the sovereign, the virtual command was earmarked for the Chief of the Staff. So low, however, had the efficiency of the Prussian Army sunk in the post-Waterloo era, that when Thiers seemed determined in 1841 to force on a European War, the King of Prussia had been unable to put his hand upon a suitable commander. He consequently turned to England, and formally asked the Duke of Wellington, then over seventy, to accept the command of the Prussian Army in the event of war with France.

How different was the condition of affairs under the regime of Moltke needs no further comment than the narrative of the great wars against Austria and France. But the German Army and nation owe to him much more than the successful conduct of these campaigns. In his capacity as Chief of the General Staff he built up a great system of administration suited to the needs of modern war, raising organization to a level previously unapproached, and reducing its principles to a science. The armies which Moltke directed were prepared for war in a sense which even Napoleon had not grasped, and no military concentration had ever before been worked out with the preliminary meticulousness of detail which enabled nearly four hundred

thousand men to be placed in the Palatinate in July 1870. As an organizer of victory, indeed, Moltke was unrivalled. In the words of the French critic General Lewal, war appeared to Moltke as *une affaire industrielle soumise aux règles précises de calcul*, and to which he brought to bear the precise and systematic methods of an up-to-date business house.

It was virtually a new organization which his genius created. Napoleon had no staff in the sense with which Moltke's name is connected. Preparation for war, as he taught it to Germany, had no counterpart at the beginning of the century. Enthusiasm and the genius and personal prestige of the commander were the conditions under which victory was achieved. But by the middle of the century the new conditions of war demanded change. The Prussian military system which had grown up after Jena involved on mobilization the calling up of the greater part of the troops from what was practically an extended furlough; and the process of collecting them from their houses, forwarding them fully equipped to their respective centres, and then transporting them in large fighting units to the zones of concentration would be painfully slow, if not impossible, unless every requirement had been foreseen and provided for in advance.

The construction of railways, by the time Moltke succeeded to his great post, had, in the opinion of no less an authority than Lord Wolseley, "revolutionized strategy," but in 1857 very few as yet were wise or foreseeing enough to perceive how much this was, or would be, the case. Moltke was amongst the very first to foresee and realize it, and to take the fact into his military calculations. In his first year of office, the war between France and Austria led to a partial mobilization of the Prussian Army, which revealed many serious faults. Quick to grasp the evils caused by delay, Moltke made up his mind to exploit the comparatively new system of transport afforded by railways to the utmost. The task was a difficult one in view of the very limited experience on which to draw, but Moltke not only laid down the broad principles of railways in war, but kept a close watch upon the various administrative



steps required to translate these principles into effect. That Prussia should become mistress of an extensive and suitable railway system was a point on which he never ceased to labour. Over and over again he pointed out the dangers which existed for a straggling country like Prussia—and one which during his early years as Chief of the Staff was actually cut in two—if compelled to face an enemy east or west, unless she herself was provided with adequate railway transport. Particularly did he lay stress upon the right of strategy to be represented in railway questions, and so insistent did he become, that gradually the General Staff came to have an influential and often a deciding voice on railway matters. In fact it is hardly too much to say that from 1857 until his death, not only was no important railway construction entered upon without reference to Moltke, but even the details likely to be of strategical importance—*e.g.* bridges, tunnels, and crossing places were invariably submitted for his consideration and approval.

Apart, however, from his position as organizer, Moltke was the instructor and director of the whole staff of the Prussian Army; under his supreme direction the officers of the Prussian staff were educated and formed. Differing from the system in vogue within the French Army at the time, the Prussian staff did not form a distinct corps. On the contrary, the Prussian staff-officers were selected, without distinction, from all arms of the service; and having served for three years as lieutenants in their regiments, and then for three years at the War Academy, these officers entered the Headquarters Staff at Berlin under Moltke. There he directed their studies in the organization of foreign armies, modern military geography, history, topography, strategy, and tactics. Thus the merits and qualifications of the embryo Prussian staff-officers became known to Moltke himself, and it was Moltke who nominated them for promotion and appointed them to the staff of the various divisions and corps.

In this capacity as instructor-in-chief to the Prussian Army Moltke forbore from making any drastic innovations, and contented himself with adopting the framework left by his predecessors and engrafting upon it his own especial

methods. The framework may be said to have been built up with the constituent parts—staff rides, tactical exercises, and military history.

Moltke did not confine his attention to the staff rides which took place under his own personal supervision, for he attached great importance to the yearly exercises of this nature which took place in the various commands. He made a practice, before these rides began, of calling for the General and Special Ideas, and an outline of the work which it was intended to carry out. On these he inserted suggestions or interpolated modifications with his own hand. Similarly, at the close of the exercise, the work done was submitted to him, and the criticisms made bear eloquent testimony to the thoroughness with which he dealt with his task. The various points of military interest thus brought to light were then written up in the form of a summary, and circulated amongst the officers of the General Staff.

The first, and at the same time the most comprehensive of these summaries is dated 1858, and contains Moltke's observations on the staff rides of the preceding twelve months. In it he lays especial stress upon the necessity for solutions simple in form and thoroughly adapted to the particular conditions of the problem. Anything merely conventional or artificial he viewed with marked disfavour, and again and again he insisted upon the need of the development of staff rides as a practical lesson in war. No less important in Moltke's eyes was the necessity of granting and fostering the utmost independence to subordinates compatible with the end in view. He scouted the idea that such policy was dangerous in tendency, and insisted that modern war was bound to bring about situations which must be dealt with by the commander on the spot, without reference to higher authority. In a word, he was strongly in favour of independence, initiative, and the acceptance of responsibility.

The *Tactical Exercises of Moltke*, dating from 1858 to 1882, were published by the German General Staff, but, to prevent their contents being too widely diffused, consent to their translation was for many years refused. They deal with the handling of troops within striking distance of the

enemy, but contain also much valuable instruction in the minor "staff duties" which fall to the lot of a subordinate commander in war, special attention being devoted to the influence of weather, roads, physical endurance, horse-mastership, and other factors. The problems are succeeded by reproductions of the verbal comments of Moltke, in which the various aspects of the case are reviewed with the most admirable lucidity, and set forth with a decision which is, however, markedly free from any trace of dictatorial omniscience. In all his comments the essentially practical nature of Moltke is revealed. He employed strategy and tactics as the means to an end, and never as the end in themselves, and never lost sight of the fact that the instruments employed were men and not machines.

The Prussian General Staff had for long been sensible of the value of historical study, and when Müffling was appointed Chief of the Staff in 1821, knowledge of the art of war was raised to "a permanent intellectual possession" by the study of military history. It was first proposed to deal with the events of the War of Liberation of 1813-1814, but unfortunately no adequate provision had been made for sifting and indexing the mass of records connected with it, and it was decided perforce to undertake a history of the Seven Years' War. In the preparation of this work Moltke had taken an active part as lieutenant and captain, and in this way, under the supervision of his chief, learnt a great deal of the art of writing military history.

When Moltke became Chief of the Staff himself, there was, however, not much opportunity for historical contribution, at first, by officers of the General Staff, due to the fact that the numbers were merely sufficient to cope with more pressing staff work. Only a few monographs were compiled, which appeared in the *Militär Wochenblatt*, which was still published by the General Staff. In 1859, however, the war between France and Austria provided a subject for historical treatment which could not be overlooked. Every phase of it, every move made, was closely scrutinized by the Prussian General Staff, and an elaborate history of the war was brought out by the Historical Section of that body under Moltke's supervision. The work



appeared in 1862, and apart from its value as a historical study is remarkable for a statement from Moltke's pen foreshadowing the powers and responsibilities which would be his, as Chief of the Staff, in the event of a Prussian army taking the field. The extract is worth quoting in full :

Some commanders have no need of counsel. They study the questions which arise, themselves decide them, and their entourage has only to execute their decisions. But such generals are stars of the first magnitude, who appear scarcely once in a century. In the great majority of cases the head of an army cannot dispense with advice. This advice may in many cases be the outcome of the deliberations of a small number of men qualified by abilities and experience to be sound judges of the situation. But in this small number, one, and one only opinion must prevail. The organization of the military hierarchy should be such as to ensure subordination even in thought, and to give the right and the duty of presenting a single opinion for the critical examination of the general-in-chief to one man and only to one. He will be appointed, not by seniority, but by reason of the confidence which he inspires. Though the advice given may not always be unconditionally the best, yet, if the action taken be consistent, and the leading idea, once adopted, be steadfastly adhered to, the affair may always be brought to a satisfactory issue. The commander-in-chief will always have, as compared with his advisers, the infinitely weightier merit of having assumed the responsibility of executing the advice given. But surround a commander with a number of independent men—the more numerous, the more distinguished, the abler they are, the worse it will be—let him hear the advice now of one now of another ; let him carry out up to a certain point a measure judicious in itself, then adopt a plan still more judicious but differing in detail, and then be convinced by the plausible objection of a third adviser and the suggestions of yet a fourth—then it is a hundred to one that, however excellent be the reasons he can assign for each measure, he will lose the war.

In every headquarters are always to be found people who with great sagacity can foresee the difficulties of every undertaking. The moment things go wrong they have no difficulty in proving that everything was foreseen by them. They are always right, for since their criticism is never constructive they can never be confounded by the result. Such men are a positive calamity. Most hapless of all is the commander who every day and every hour is liable to be called to account for every project proposed on plan ; hampered by a delegate with full

powers at his headquarters and bound to a telegraph wire behind him. It is in this way initiative, every quiet decision, and every wise conception is shattered. And without these no war can be waged.

The brief outline given in this chapter of the scope of the work of Moltke as Chief of the Staff, and of his views of the importance and responsibility of his office, render it easy to understand how these factors tended to develop initiative, self-reliance, and, above all, unity of doctrine. Trained under the master's eye, his work criticized by the master's hand, and his appointment made by the master's direct and personal selection, it was natural that the young General Staff Officer should receive the impress of Moltke's personality, and should be apt, even years later, in a crisis, to act in a manner in harmony with the Moltke spirit. And this unity of doctrine was comparatively easy to bring about when the comparatively small numbers of the Prussian General Staff are borne in mind. When Moltke became the head of that body, the total number of the officers of the General Staff, including Moltke himself, was only sixty-four, and in the event of the army taking the field, this number merely required to be expanded to eighty-three.<sup>1</sup>

It must be borne in mind, however, that the Prussian General Staff enjoyed a status and a power quite disproportionate to its size. On the staff of every division, corps, or army was to be found an officer whose title might be Generalstabsofficier, Chef des General Stabes, or Chef des Stabes, according to the importance of the unit. Such officer was, however, by no means the property of the general to whose command he was attached. He was, it is true, the chief staff-officer to the commander, but he never ceased to belong to, and to represent at the side of the general, the

<sup>1</sup> <i>i.e.</i> G.H.Q. . . . .	8
3 Army H.Q. (7 officers each) . . . .	21
9 Corps H.Q. (3 officers each) . . . .	27
18 Infantry Divisions (1 officer each) . .	18
9 Cavalry Divisions (1 officer each) . . .	9
	<hr/>
	83

At the beginning of the Franco-German War the German General Staff for the field armies had increased to 190.

General Staff of the Army of which Moltke was the chief. Inevitably this influence of the General Staff was evolved from the system by which royal personages were entrusted, not altogether on military grounds, with high commands. The case of Moltke himself was on a par with the position of army, corps, and divisional chief staff-officers. In 1866 and 1870 King William was no mere figurehead ; he was, in fact, an extremely capable soldier ; but, as a rule, and especially in the latter war, he refrained from interfering with the line of action taken by Moltke, and something of the same system permeated to the lesser units. The relation between the Crown Prince and Blumenthal is a case in point. Both in the Austrian and Franco-German wars Blumenthal acted on more than one occasion rather as the representative of Moltke than as the chief adviser of his own commander. In each of these wars he actually refrained on occasion from awaking the Crown Prince when important orders had come in late at night from General Headquarters, and took the necessary steps on his own responsibility.<sup>1</sup> The system had some obvious drawbacks, but on the whole it must have been of considerable assistance to Moltke that the executive power at the various subordinate headquarters was in the hands of officers trained in one and the same school, and the school of which he was the head.

<sup>1</sup> The incident in 1866 is related on p. 148, *footnote*, and p. 151, *footnote*. The case in the Franco-German War occurred in December 1870, but is not specifically alluded to in the text.



## CHAPTER XII

### REFORM OF THE PRUSSIAN ARMY IN 1859

ALTHOUGH Prussia was not directly affected by the Italian War, it was, in a sense, the prelude to the Moltke era of 1866 and 1870. It was a war which not only dealt a heavy blow at the prestige of Austria but brought out clearly the impossibility of real co-operation between Austria and Prussia to a common end. When the Prince Regent offered the services of the Prussian army against France, the Emperor Francis Joseph refused the offer, except on the impossible condition that the Prussian Army should be placed under a general to be nominated by the Federal Diet. Political relations between Austria and Prussia thus underwent another strain. Again, the war clearly showed that the "magnificent swindle" of the second Empire could at any rate place a well-trained and successful army in the field, and emphasized the fact that Prussia must gird herself for the struggle with the old enemy, France, no less than with her rival and neighbour Austria.

There was a good deal of *timeo Danaos* in the feelings of Austria towards the Prussian proposal; and it does not appear from extant correspondence of Moltke's that he understood, or even tried to understand, Austria's point of view. The German problem at the time was indeed baffling some of the finest intellects. But there was one man in Prussia who saw clearly that, in the face of the military success of the Second Empire and of the further strain on Prusso-Austrian relations, there was one condition absolutely indispensable for any progress in German affairs. That man was the Prince Regent, and the condition which he saw plainly indicated was the immediate remodelling of the Prussian army.

The existing Prussian military organization was based on the laws of 1814 and 1815, which, on the basis of universal

service, assigned all the male population for three years to the regular army and for a further two years to the army reserve ; and after this regular service, there was a further term of seven years in the first and seven more in the second levy of the Landwehr or militia. In time of war the regular army and the first levy of the Landwehr would constitute the active army in the field, while the second levy would garrison the fortresses.

In 1815 the population was something over 10,000,000, and the number of recruits posted was about 40,000 ; the number and strength of regiments of the line were, therefore, established on the basis of three such yearly drafts. By 1855, however, the population had increased to nearly 18,000,000, and the number of those liable to serve had risen to some 65,000 ; but the regiments of the regular army still possessed the machinery adequate merely for passing the original figure of 40,000 to the Landwehr, with the result that every year 25,000 young men escaped military service altogether. In such circumstances "universal service" became merely an empty phrase and injustice abounded in every quarter. As has been mentioned above, the first levy of the Landwehr, consisting of men from 25 to 32 years of age, who had already served their time in the regulars, belonged to the active army destined for the field. Mobilizations in 1849, 1850, and 1859 had revealed the fact that half of these men were married and fathers of families whose death would ruin whole households ; and yet they were to be exposed to the fire of the enemy while thousands of unmarried youths were sitting quietly at home. But this was not all. Between the regular officers and those of the Landwehr there was a very great difference. The former were professional soldiers, highly trained and continuously with their troops ; the latter, for the most part, had passed through but a compressed one year's training and they lacked the experience of the regular army. The result was an added misfortune for the Landwehr rank and file ; not only would these fathers of families have to take their place in the front line in time of war, but they would have to do so under officers markedly inferior to those who commanded younger men.

After long consideration of many possible systems the Prince Regent fixed on one of extreme simplicity. The universal liability to serve was made once more a reality, and the annual quota was raised from 40,000 to 63,000 men. In order that it might absorb these accessories, the regular army required an increase of 39 infantry and 10 cavalry regiments. On the other hand, the first levy of the Landwehr was divided into two parts. The younger men were added to the army reserve, while the remainder were transferred to the second levy, and assigned to garrison duty. By this arrangement the young men of military age were roped into the regular army, the married men of the Landwehr were relieved from first line duty, and the active army everywhere was provided with trained officers. The Regent seized the occasion of the mobilization of 1859 for applying the system, but immediately there was an uproar throughout the country, in which there still lingered the idea that a regular army was an unneeded luxury, and that the peculiar representative of the people—the Landwehr or militia—had been the chief instrument of the glories of the War of Liberation. The War Minister General von Bonin did not feel himself adapted for the parliamentary contest thus brought about and resigned.

He was succeeded on the 5th December 1859 by a man of conspicuous talent, passionate energy, and absolutist convictions. This was General Albrecht von Roon, whose work in the reorganization of the army was to do much for gaining for Prussia the pre-eminent place she occupied for half a century from 1866. Roon was a Pomeranian by birth, some three years younger than Moltke. In 1825 he had entered the army, being posted to the 14th Infantry Regiment, and during his early military life compiled a handbook of political and military geography, which had an enormous circulation. Like Moltke, Roon showed aptitude for survey and topographical work, and as a result of the good service displayed on this side of the military art he was nominated in 1836 to be captain on the General Staff. In 1844 he was selected to superintend the military education of Prince Frederick Charles, and accompanied him not only to the University of Bonn but also on his grand



tour through the continent. In 1848 Roon was appointed to the General Staff of the VIIIth Corps, becoming later in the year Chief of the Staff of the same corps, and by the end of 1858 he was a major-general commanding the 14th Division at Dusseldorf.

The reception of the scheme for army reorganization, when presented to the Lower House, was distinctly unfavourable. The additional expenditure was indeed voted ; but strictly as a temporary measure, and a storm was raised by the action of the War Office in creating the new regiments, to whom the Regent solemnly presented colours, before the financial question was definitely settled. William I., who had become King in 1861, peremptorily refused to disavow the accomplished facts, and a constitutional crisis quickly developed. The King was in an extremely difficult position. On the one hand his liberal ministers saw no solution but to yield, on the other Roon and Moltke daily reminded him that the army as a monarchical institution was at stake. At heart William recognized clearly that with Austria on one flank and the militant French Empire on the other it was madness to contemplate Prussia without the strongest army she could maintain. Roon forced the issue in September 1862 by his historic telegram to Bismarck in Paris—"Come. The pear is ripe. *Periculum in mora.*" A week later the Prussian Parliament declined to grant the sum necessary for military reforms unless the King prepared to make concessions which would wreck the scheme. The cabinet resigned ; and the King retorted by making the man of "blood and iron" president of the ministry.

"The great questions of the time are not to be solved by speech and parliamentary votes, but by blood and iron"—such were Bismarck's words uttered on September 29, 1862. They fell like a bombshell in Germany, and even William I. was for the moment dismayed. But Bismarck never faltered ; he spent money which had not been voted : for four years the state was administered without a constitutionally settled budget. But he carried through the scheme of army reform, which was strenuously supported by Moltke and Roon.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WAR WITH DENMARK, 1864—RUPTURE WITH AUSTRIA, 1866

WHILE the Prussian army was continuing thus to exist in a condition of doubtful legality, circumstances were shaping themselves to call it into action. On November 28, 1862, Roon wrote officially to Moltke, pointing out that the disputes then pending with Denmark might render war possible, and asking whether such eventuality had been considered in the Chief of the Staff's office. A few days later Moltke replied and offered his suggestions.

"So long," he wrote, "as our navy is unable to cover a landing upon Zeeland, where we could dictate peace in Copenhagen itself, there remains only the occupation of the Jutish Peninsula, which, to be effective as a constraint upon Denmark, must be of long duration, but which in that case may provoke the diplomatic intervention and even the actual interference of other Powers. The real military objective, so long as the seat of the Danish Government is inaccessible to us, is the Danish army. Merely to drive it back, however, will not lead to the end of the war. Not a first victory, but a victory made the most of by a pursuit which will destroy the enemy's forces before they have reached their safe points of embarkation is the goal to be aimed at, and the only one that is attainable."

The appreciation is of interest as revealing the inferiority of the weak Prussian navy, which had grown up since 1850, and the acceptance by Moltke of the fact that such inferiority existed.

The expected war was not long delayed. In the autumn of 1863 Moltke presided over a Federal Commission at Frankfort, where the subject of discussion was the means of enforcing the Federal claims against Denmark. An understanding was arrived at, but it was only of a temporary

nature, and in 1863 the death without heirs male of Frederick VII., King of Denmark and Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, revived again the interminable question of the Duchies. In the following year Austria and Prussia, repudiating the action of the Diet, intervened by force of arms. The war which ensued is of triple interest in that it was the first to be waged during the long tenure by Moltke of his high office ; it provided a dress rehearsal for the new organization of the Prussian military system ; and it formed the last chapter of the political struggle between Austria and Prussia for pride of place in Germany. The strategical situation of the second war over the Duchies was far different from that of the contest in 1848, from which Denmark had emerged victorious, for she had now to face two strong powers on land instead of one ; and as regards the vital factor of maritime command the inclusion of the Austrian navy against her was a serious handicap. That the war was not over in the first few weeks was due entirely to the leisurely arrival of the Austrian squadron from the Adriatic, a fact which enabled Denmark for a time to hold her own. In the opening stages of the war the situation generally was that on land Denmark could oppose only some 37,000 men to the 60,000 put in the field by Prussia and Austria ; but whereas by sea Prussia could reckon only on three corvettes and some eighteen gunboats, Denmark had the appreciable superiority conferred by a battleship and four frigates in addition to smaller craft.

The war ended in the total defeat of Denmark ; and although the troops bore themselves gallantly, the support rendered by the Danish navy was far from being of the same standard as that given in 1848 and 1849. During the earlier stages Moltke remained at Berlin, but after the storming of Düppel, certain changes were made in the composition of the field armies. The King went in person to Schleswig to greet his victorious troops, Moltke being among his suite, and it was then decided that Lieutenant-General Vogel von Falckenstein should take command of the corps which was to occupy Jutland, and that Moltke should act as Chief of the Staff of the whole field army.

In spite of the inferiority of the Prussian navy, he



devoted considerable attention to plans for carrying operations into the islands where it was possible the Danes would retire, if, and when, the fighting on land went against them. By the spring, indeed, the largest part of the Danish army had made its asylum in Alsén, and Moltke drew up a plan for transferring Prussian troops thither from the mainland. The operation, which was fixed for the night of the 1st-2nd April, had to be abandoned owing to stormy weather, and a subsequent project for moving troops to Funen was given up owing to political considerations and the opposition of the Austrian Government. By the end of June, however, circumstances had changed. The whole Danish army was now practically concentrated in Alsén and Funen, and though the Danish fleet held the command of the Baltic, the situation in the North Sea and Kattegat was by no means so favourable. The allies crossed the narrow strait, and forced a successful landing in Alsén on June 29, the plan for which was either drawn up or revised by the Chief of the Staff. Subsequently Moltke drew up a further plan for transferring operations to Zeeland, but the Treaty of Vienna, October 30, 1864, put an end to the war before the project could be put into execution.

Nominally, the result of the war was that Denmark renounced all her rights over the duchies to Austria and Prussia conjointly; but as the aim of Bismarck was, and had been all along, to oust Austria, the relations between the two Powers soon became so strained that war between them was imminent. On August 14, 1865, however, the Convention of Gastein was concluded, by which, while the principle of condominium was to be maintained, Austria was to have the administration of Holstein, while Prussia was to be responsible for Schleswig. The latter power was also to have the right to construct a canal through Holstein from the Baltic to the North Sea, and Kiel was to become the base of a German Federal fleet, though the harbour was to be under the control of Prussia.

When the long and acute rivalry between Austria and Prussia is borne in mind, and when it is remembered that the Minister President of Prussia was determined to stake everything on the attempt to eject Austria from Germany,

it will be realized that the Convention of Gastein was not likely to prove a means of lasting peace. Early in 1866 Notes were being exchanged between Berlin and Vienna, and on February 28 a council was held at the Prussian capital under the presidency of the King, at which Moltke was present. Ten days later a similar council was held at Vienna, attended by General von Benedek. For the next few weeks the exchange of diplomatic Notes went on, each side striving to throw the onus of a breach upon the other, while endeavouring to make its own intentions and actions appear merely defensive in character. In diplomacy, however, Prussia was to secure an immense advantage. Bismarck had talked over Napoleon III. into a promise of neutrality, and in April 1866 he came to terms with Victor Emanuel for the active assistance of Italy.

This last action of Prussia stung Austria to the quick. War was now plainly inevitable, and mobilization was ordered on both sides, although the pretence of diplomatic negotiations with regard to the duchies still went on. On June 1 Austria announced that the settlement of Schleswig-Holstein must be entrusted to the Germanic Confederation, to which Prussia retorted that since Austria had not fulfilled her obligations, Prussian troops would take action in Holstein. On June 7 General von Manteuffel crossed the frontier at the head of 12,000 men. The Austrian commander, with a force of barely 5000, was unable to oppose the advance, and retired first to Altona and thence to Hamburg, where the Austrian troops entrained for South Germany. Hostilities had now actually begun, although the formal declaration of war was still delayed. This was, however, not long deferred, for Austria forced the issue by an appeal to the Confederation on June 14. The Diet agreed to mobilize the Federal army against Prussia, whereupon Prussia formally withdrew from the Confederation. Bavaria, Saxony, Hanover, and the two Hesses sided with Austria, while Prussia was supported by some of the petty states of the north and the cities of Hamburg, Lübeck, and Bremen. The inevitable had come to pass, and the future of Prussia was now in the hands of Moltke and the Prussian army.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WAR OF 1866—THE OPENING PHASE

THE war of 1866 did not take place because the existence of Prussia was threatened, nor in obedience to public opinion, nor to the will of the people. It was a war long foreseen, prepared with deliberation, and recognized as necessary by the Cabinet, not in order to obtain territorial aggrandizement, but in order to secure the establishment of Prussia's hegemony in Germany. The words are Moltke's own, deliberately expressed by him in later life. Ostensibly the friction between Austria and Prussia after the Danish War of 1864 led to the struggle of two years later. In reality, the war of 1866 was the long-delayed surgical operation on a sore which had been festering for over fifty years.

As a student of war, brought up in the school of Clausewitz, Moltke had viewed the contest which he recognized to be inevitable with a statesman's, no less than with a soldier's, eye. Naturally his appointment as Chief of the General Staff had led him to devote his mind even more earnestly to the great problem of Germany, and in the year 1860 he had drawn up a memorandum on the political state of Europe, the possible alliances, and the probable grouping of the various contingents which would be employed in a European war in the following terms :

A war between Austria and Prussia would affect the interests of all the European Powers. An outstanding success on the part of either of the belligerents would put an end to the internal dissensions in Germany, would place the smaller states under the hegemony of the victor, and would create in Central Europe a powerful state, equal, and indeed superior, both in power and influence to any of its neighbours.



Of all the Great Powers, England is the one which stands in greatest need of a continental ally. She will never find one more useful to her interests than a united Germany, a Germany which, without aspiring to supremacy at sea, would nevertheless occupy for ever, and with a view to the maintenance of peace, a strong central position between the Latins of the West and the Slavs of the East.

France, least of all nations, could witness with equanimity a war, the result of which would be the creation of a German Empire of 70,000,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, France is in a position to derive from the struggle considerable advantages, for she aims at the annexation of Belgium, the Rhenish provinces, and possibly even Holland. Further she would have the certainty of such territorial gains in the event of the Prussian armies being held upon the Elbe or Oder. An alliance between France and Prussia would, therefore, hold out no inducement to the former.

Austria would be prepared for the sacrifice of German territory on the left bank of the Rhine in view of her aim to consolidate her power in the East.

For these reasons Russia will range herself on the Prussian side. In spite of her desire to extend along the Baltic her real interests are in the East. Nothing is more opposed to Russian ideals than the aggrandizement of Austria.

Unfortunately for Prussia, Russian assistance has two disadvantages. It is always too powerful and always too late. Moscow, the centre of gravity of the Russian Empire, is as far from Berlin as Naples or Madrid. Consequently the Russian army will arrive either after our victories, when we shall not require it; or after our defeats, when Russia will take care to extract compensations for her services. Although the political situation of Italy is still undeveloped, it is clear that Sardinia will be allied with us against France and Austria and even against a combination of these two Powers should they unite against us. It is our interest, therefore, to promote the development of this new Power.

To sum up; France is the enemy of Prussia. She will try to conquer the Rhine provinces. Austria will not move. Russia, and probably England, will be sympathetic towards Prussia. But the assistance of the former will arrive too late, and that of the latter will have no appreciable significance. Belgium, Holland, and Italy will form a support for Prussia.

The states of North Germany will be obliged under the threat of loss of their existence to ally themselves with Prussia. Saxony alone—or at any rate the Saxon government—will side with Austria.

South Germany will probably enact a mutual treaty of neutrality, possibly under French protection.

The military situation can be deduced only from these uncertain but inevitable political combinations. Still the following may be laid down :

1. In a war against Prussia, Austria cannot strip bare her eastern frontier.

2. Another portion of the Austrian forces will be locked up in Italy.

3. On the other hand Prussia will not be able to employ her two Rhenish corps (VIIth and VIIIth) to protect Brandenburg and Silesia. These corps will have to operate on the Rhine with the corps of Belgium, Holland, and eventually those of England.

4. The contingents of the Xth (Federal) Corps. can be used only to watch Denmark, and eventually to defend the Rhine. A French invasion would menace even Hanover and Oldenburg.

Moltke then proceeds to point out that Prussia would be able to employ in the field her seven corps of the eastern portion of the monarchy, and lays down the concentration area which he recommended for this force. The main area lay between Berlin and the Saxon frontier, and was contained generally in the triangle Halle—Baruth—Spremburg, while one corps, the VIth, was to concentrate in Silesia around Schweidnitz.

At the same time, Moltke was busy with a plan to provide the best protection for Berlin in the event of an Austrian offensive launched against the Prussian capital. He deprecated strongly the choice of any position perpendicular to the Austrian line of advance, insisting that defeat would probably ensue, that Berlin would fall, and that the Prussian army might be pushed back as far as Stettin. On the other hand, he laid down that Berlin would be far better protected if the Prussian forces were, in the first instance, to take up a flanking position along the left bank of the Elbe between Wittenberg and Torgau, whence they could at the proper moment take the offensive against the enemy's left rear. This plan, if adopted, would necessitate no other fortification of Berlin, except the construction of some works upon the southern front capable of offering resistance merely for a few days against the enemy. This choice of a flanking

position against the enemy's advance is an echo of his plan for dealing with Ibrahim Pasha during his Turkish days.

In comparison with the circumstances existing at the time when the appreciation of 1860 was drawn up, the situation of Prussia, as regards the war with Austria, had undergone an improvement by 1866. Russia had been placated by the action of Bismarck during the Polish rebellion of 1863, and France had declined, for the moment, from a probable to a possible opponent. In 1865, replying to a Memorandum from von Roon enquiring into the length of time which Prussia would require to mobilize in case of war with Austria, Moltke drew attention to the fact that France was not in the same position to threaten Prussia as she had been a few years earlier. "France," he wrote, "has now in Algeria, Mexico, Rome, and on the way to Cochin China at least 84,600 men, so that she can now dispose of no more than 270,000." Nevertheless, although Napoleon III. had given Bismarck to understand that he would preserve a benevolent neutrality, he had concealed his further wishes in deep silence. As Chief of the General Staff, Moltke was obviously in a position to know that the prevailing opinion in Paris was that Prussia would suffer defeat, and would then be at the mercy of France. Besides, Moltke disliked Napoleon and the French, and he was certain to view with distrust any promise of neutrality given by the Emperor.

The one thing which would keep France out of the arena was victory by Prussia, overwhelming, decisive, and, above all things, swift. A purely defensive war would infallibly set free that flood of diplomatic notes, proposals, and suggestions which would give the French Emperor just the opportunity he desired of interposing as the champion of civilization. Anything, therefore, in the shape of "wearing down," anything which might win the title of a "war by exhaustion," could be ruled out of court at once. The victory achieved by such means might be as decisive and overwhelming, in the long run, as anything in history, but few situations could arise more disastrous for Prussia than to have to rebuckle her armour on to limbs, jaded by an



exhausting struggle, for a contest with a fresh and bellicose France.

No less urgently were decisiveness and speed called for by the political conditions of Germany itself. In Prussia the war was unpopular with all classes, except with the Junker caste and the immediate entourage of the King. The policy of Bismarck was actively disliked, Bismarck himself was the most universally hated man in Prussia, and the parliament, the people, and the very soldiers loathed the thought of fighting with their brothers to uphold his policy. If the war had to be, it was advisable in these circumstances that it should be over quickly and crowned with victory. "It is truly remarkable," wrote Blumenthal<sup>1</sup> in his diary as late as May 9, "with what tenacity the man in the street clings to the idea that there will be no war. Nobody wants it; in fact they all dread it." And the same aspect of affairs was referred to in a Memorandum drawn up nine days later by the General Staff for Moltke's perusal:

The public opinion of the country must not be overlooked. At the moment it is increasingly hostile to the idea of war. Unless the army is quickly set in motion its *moral* will be seriously affected. Owing to the prevailing spirit of discontent and the hostility of the democratic party, there will be popular risings unless we act quickly.

As for the other parts of Germany, they had been so bullied, trodden upon, and insulted by Prussia, that even war was preferable to the continuance of subjection to her insults. It is true that beneath this fear and detestation of Prussia there lurked the suspicion that it was perhaps chiefly in Prussian strength and egoism that there lay the real hope of a permanent decision for German unity; but it was only by a sweeping Prussian victory that this sentiment could be usefully developed. A long-drawn-out civil war, similar to that which had just closed in America, could never secure for Prussia the crowning mercy of complete victory which the North had won. The strategic conditions were entirely dissimilar. The possibility of wearing down her opponents by economic exhaustion, vouchsafed to the

<sup>1</sup> Chief of the Staff of the IInd Army.

North by the existence of the Atlantic coast-line and the waterway of the Mississippi, and by the possession of maritime command, had no possible parallel in Central Europe. The policy of slow strangling could not be entertained; unless Prussia could knock out her opponents in the first few rounds it were better that she had not stepped into the ring at all.

The first step towards the rapid, decisive, and overwhelming victory so clearly required was that Prussia should throw down the gauntlet without a moment's delay. The longer she hesitated, the more time would be given to her adversary for complete equipment, and the greater would be the dangers and losses which would fall upon her own people. This was Bismarck's view, and it was agreed in completely by Moltke, as well as by the most influential generals, Roon and Manteuffel among the number. And it was with his ideas thus shaped that Moltke attended a great council of war held at Berlin on February 28, 1866.

King William presided in person, and in a speech dealing with the difficulties in Holstein, emphasized his opinion that Austria was endeavouring to hold Prussia in subjection. "This conduct must finally be checked even at the risk of war. We will not provoke a war," he said in closing, "but we must go forward on our way, and not shrink from war should it come." Bismarck followed with a résumé in historical order of the various attempts of Austria to oppose Prussia, and declared himself strongly in favour of immediate action. "A war with Austria," he said, "must certainly come, sooner or later. It is wiser to undertake it now, under the present favourable conditions, than to allow Austria to choose the moment most auspicious for herself. The rupture between us has already been effected." Roon followed in the same strain, and after four or five more Ministers had spoken and the possibilities of neutrality on the part of Napoleon had been discussed, Moltke rose.

His share in the discussion was limited to giving a definite statement as to the relative strengths of the military forces of Prussia on the one hand and of Austria and the other German States upon the other. The kernel of his statement

was that the one indispensable condition of certain success lay in the active participation of Italy. Austria would in these circumstances be able to station no more than 240,000 men in Bohemia. Against these, Prussia could bring the same number into action without calling the Landwehr to the field, while disposing of 50,000 men to deal with Bavaria and the other South German states. The emphatic tone of Moltke in laying stress upon the importance of Italian assistance made a great impression on his hearers, and on Bismarck's suggestion it was decided that Moltke himself should be sent to Florence to conclude an alliance with Italy on certain specified terms.

Although the tenor of the great majority of the speeches had been distinctly in favour of war, that of the Crown Prince, who was the last to give his vote, was in marked contrast. "The war with Austria," he said, "will be a war between brothers, and the interference of foreign Powers is certain." The King closed the session with the words that he wished for peace, but that, if it must be so, he was prepared for war; and that, after having prayed to God to lead him in the right path, he should regard the war as a just one.

Moltke's final instructions for his mission to Florence were ready on March 12, but a telegram from Bismarck to the Italian government was crossed by one from La Marmora to Bismarck to the effect that it was proposed to send an Italian officer to Berlin to "negotiate about political and military matters," and Moltke's journey was therefore postponed, and finally cancelled. The treaty with Italy was concluded on April 8. It was a treaty which imposed on that Power obligations without any compensatory rights, except the possible reversion of Venetia. It provided that if Prussia were forced to take up arms Italy was to declare war; there was to be no separate peace; the Italian Navy was to prevent the Austrian fleet from reaching the Baltic, and the treaty was to be valid only for three months if Prussia did not declare war. Prussia therefore enjoyed the right of making war when and if she chose, and if she were so to choose she would not go into it alone.

The importance of the adhesion of Italy was twofold. It



ensured that a part of the Austrian army would be locked up south of the Alps, and it threw difficulties in the way of Napoleon, as protector of Italy, engaging in open hostilities against Prussia. That is possibly all that can be said as regards the influence it was likely to exert on the prospect of French interference. Von Sybel has placed on record his opinion that hostile action by Napoleon in these circumstances was practically impossible, but that is to rate Italian co-operation too high. Napoleon may have been the protector of Italy, but France was the hereditary foe of Prussia, and the Emperor was the last man to forgo the possibility of gaining military prestige at the expense of Prussia if he could. To no man in Germany was this clearer than to the Prussian Chief of the Staff.

Although speed was above all things essential, Moltke's hands were tied by the hesitation of William I. and by the sentiments of the Crown Prince. If it were necessary for Prussia's honour, King William, indeed, was as ready as any man to go to war against Austria, but it was a hard and painful decision for him to make. Political principles, family associations and memories, and personal ties drew him towards Austria, and the dreadful responsibility which was laid upon him of having to utter the word which would plunge Germany into the horrors of what would really be a civil war was not to be lightly undertaken. The tradition of the cruelty, the suffering, and the waste of the Thirty Years' War still lived in Germany, two centuries after that struggle had ceased. William I., too, had himself served in the field in his early manhood; he knew what war was, and what the consequences of the approaching conflict would be. He was firmly resolved not to draw the sword until every honourable peaceful solution had been tried and exhausted.

Apart from the difficulty caused by the political factor just described, there was the strategical difficulty due to the fact that the war would have to be fought out on three fronts. Hanover and Hesse Cassel together formed one group, South Germany the second, while the third and most formidable was represented by Austria and Saxony. Moltke estimated the force of the first as some 36,000 men, that of the second—which comprised Bavaria, Würtemberg,

and Hesse Darmstadt—at 100,000, while it was reckoned that Austria and Saxony between them could put 264,000 into the field. Neither the first nor second of these groups was, however, considered a formidable enemy, and Moltke was well aware of the imperfect organization which prevailed in them in time of peace; although it was obvious that, if left unnoticed in the rear, Hanover and Hesse Cassel could exert a very significant threat against the communications between Prussia and the Rhine and Elbe Duchies. But, after all, the key to the whole strategical situation was the third group, of which the Austrian army provided some 240,000 men. The defeat of Austria would cut the ground from under the feet of her German allies, and to Moltke the safest plan seemed to be to direct the bulk of the Prussian forces to the primary theatre of operations, and to leave merely an irreducible minimum to deal with the other opponents.

It was soon brought home to the military chiefs of Prussia that they had lost an important advantage—the possibility of striking first. On April 13 Austria issued orders as to arming of her northern fortresses, and on the following day all reserves and men on furlough of the field artillery were summoned to the colours, and the immediate purchase of horses to put the army upon a war footing was decreed. These measures were quickly followed by the issue to the various divisions of the mobilization and march orders necessary for the formation of a Northern and Southern Army. It was not until May 3 that anything approaching general mobilization was ordered in Berlin. On that date the whole of the cavalry of the line, all the artillery and the infantry of the IIIrd, IVth, Vth, and VIth Corps—that is to say, the corps nearest the Austrian frontier—received their mobilization orders. Austria had undoubtedly gained a certain advantage over her principal opponent, though this was to some extent counterbalanced later by the greater efficiency of the Prussian railway system.

The general feeling amongst the military chiefs of Prussia had been strongly in favour of a concentration in Lusatia, as a preliminary to a single offensive, and Moltke, in principle, had favoured this solution; his idea being to

assemble the main Prussian armies round Görlitz. For such a plan it was, however, absolutely essential that the advance across the Bohemian frontier should follow without delay, as the difficulties of feeding a quarter of a million men, congested indefinitely within a restricted area, would have been almost insurmountable. The King, however, was still opposed to such a course. Apart from this drawback, the actual massing of the troops within such area would have had to be carried out chiefly by one line of railway, with the result that the start which had been granted to Austria would have been further increased. Early in May the time had passed for concentrating the great mass of the Prussian army at Görlitz or any other given point. The only thing to do was to utilize every means of communication and to move the Prussian forces, in consequence, to more than one concentration area. The troops to take the field against Austria and Saxony were, therefore, organized in three armies, which were designated the Army of the Elbe, the Ist and IIInd Armies; Prussian Saxony, Lusatia, and Lower Silesia respectively being assigned as the areas of concentration. On May 16 the advance of these bodies to the frontier began, railheads being fixed at Zeitz, Halle, Herzberg, Görlitz, Schweidnitz, and Neisse. These places lay on a line some 280 miles in length.

Although time had been gained by utilizing every available railway, the result was a very wide dissemination of the Prussian forces. The danger inseparable from a continuance of their wide dispersal was obvious, and the problem to be considered was the best method for bringing various portions into closer touch. The two possible methods were either a concentration behind the frontier, that is, in Prussian territory, or a concentration across the frontier in Moravia or Bohemia. In principle, Moltke favoured the latter and more daring scheme, but since the King was anxious even at this time to throw the onus of a rupture on Austria, it was dismissed as impracticable. There remained only a flank march along and behind the frontier, and accordingly, on May 30, some days before the detrainment was complete, the Army of the Elbe and the Ist Army were ordered to close to the east; and at the same time the connecting corps—the



Ist—between the Ist and IIInd Armies marched to Hirschberg, where it joined the latter army, to which it was henceforth definitely attached. These movements were carried out by June 8, by which date the strategical concentration of the Prussians may be said to have been complete.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The exact positions of the troops then were :

#### ARMY OF THE ELBE

(General Herwath von Bittenfeld)

Advanced Guard	.	.	.	.	.	Mühlberg.
14th Division	.	.	.	.	.	Schildau.
15th Division	.	.	.	.	.	Belgern.
16th Division and Reserve Cavalry	.	.	.	.	.	Liebenwerde.
Reserve Artillery	.	.	.	.	.	Torgau.

#### Ist ARMY

(Prince Frederick Charles)

IIIrd Corps	.	.	.	.	.	Görlitz.
IVth Corps	.	.	.	.	.	Hoyerswerde.
IIInd Corps	.	.	.	.	.	Senftenberg.

#### IIInd ARMY\*

(Crown Prince of Prussia)

Ist Corps	.	.	.	.	.	Hirschberg.
Vth Corps	.	.	.	.	.	Landshut.
VIth Corps	.	.	.	.	.	Waldenburg.
Cavalry Division	.	.	.	.	.	Round Striegau.

\* The Guard Corps later joined this Army.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—CONSIDERATIONS ON OPENING PHASE

PRUSSIA had been late in getting off the mark, with the result that her troops were still widely disseminated. For several reasons, however, Moltke was able to review the situation without dismay. The first reason was the relative inferiority of the Austrian military machine as compared with that of Prussia, a factor which could not have been hidden from the personal knowledge of Moltke, for he had seen the Austrians fighting in 1864, and had been himself in the Austrian capital as late as January, 1865.<sup>1</sup> The financial embarrassment of the Empire during the past few years had led to a thoroughly inadequate system of training, with the result that barely 50 per cent of the Austrian rank and file spent twelve months with the colours, and to this deficiency was added the lack of capable non-commissioned officers, due to the same cause. Owing to the enforced need of parsimony in military finance, many an Austrian soldier who, in theory, had served his time had sunk back to the stage of a raw recruit. Further, the troops were composed to a great extent of the very lowest classes of the population—due largely to the pernicious system of allowing substitution to be purchased by those who had drawn an unlucky number at the recruiting lottery—and this drawback was magnified by the number of different races which formed part of the mosaic of the Austrian Empire. Not only were some of these nationalities without any common loyalty to

<sup>1</sup> Moltke accompanied Prince Frederick Charles to Vienna when the latter went there to report to the Emperor after the disbanding of the Federal Corps he had commanded in 1864.

the Empire, but they were hostile among themselves. In consequence of the political differences and quarrels between the component parts of the Empire, Italian regiments were garrisoned in Bohemia, and Hungarian regiments in Venice, so that the calling up and posting of reserves under this system was bound to hamper mobilization.

The second military asset which Moltke counted upon was the electric telegraph. It is of course true that this new feature of warfare was not reserved exclusively for the Prussian side ; nevertheless, it is equally true that the side which by choice or necessity was committed to an extended deployment, and probably, therefore, to a double line of operations, would extract the maximum advantage from it. From his desk at Berlin the wire would enable Moltke to co-ordinate and direct the forward movements of the two wings in a manner which would rob dispersion of an appreciable portion of its risks. The telegraph, too, was in 1866 no mere toy, nor an apparatus whose employment and advantages had been proved merely in commercial ventures ; it had been tried in, and had stood the test of, war ; and Moltke was certainly not insensible to its value in the American Civil War which had only just concluded. At the same time it is possible that Moltke took too roseate a view of the capabilities of the wires, and it is a historical fact that a break-down of the telegraph service at a critical moment largely discounted its theoretical advantages. The telegraph was never so much needed in the campaign as during the evening and night of July 2, just before the battle of Königgrätz, but no communication of this nature existed between the two armies, nor even within them, and the message which brought the Crown Prince to the field was sent by a mounted officer.<sup>1</sup>

The third factor was the marked advantage pertaining to the Prussian infantry over the Austrian, by the possession of the needle-gun.

In the long peace which followed Waterloo the several nations of Europe had shown a marked disinclination to effect improvements in armament. The one exception was Prussia, whose military chiefs quickly recognized in 1827 the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 151.



possibilities of a rifle taking a new cartridge ignited by a small steel rod or needle, pressed through its base by the hammer of the gun. The weapon was the invention of a Saxon, John Nicholas Dreyse, and from its novel mechanism received the name of "Needle-gun." Recognizing that the weapon was still capable of improvement, Dreyse continued to work at it until 1836, when he introduced a musket which in addition to the advantage of the needle action could be loaded from the breech. The Prussian Government tried the weapon very severely and, then satisfied with its performances, accepted it. At first it was issued merely to fusilier battalions, and there was no indication that Prussia attached any excessive importance to the new piece; but secretly she was carrying out manufacture on a large scale. This was revealed in 1848, when the arsenal at Berlin was stormed by the mob, and a very large supply of rifles of the new pattern was revealed. Secrecy being no longer possible, the weapon was gradually served out to the whole army, and a trial of its efficiency was made when an army corps under the Prince of Prussia—later King William I.—was sent to put down the Baden insurgents in 1851-2. In that campaign it justified its selection up to the hilt, and its claim to be considered the best musket in Europe was further brought out in the Danish war of 1864. The value placed upon it by the Prussian higher command is shown by the fact that in that year the inventor was ennobled—a significant mark of esteem in an aristocratic state like Prussia.<sup>1</sup>

In range and flatness of trajectory the needle-gun was actually inferior to the muzzle-loader of the Austrians, but this inferiority was completely outweighed by two outstanding advantages. It could be loaded extremely rapidly as compared with the Austrian weapon; and it could be loaded in the lying-down position. The moral effect produced by the possibility of developing strong fire action without exposure on the part of the firer was enormous, and was certain to be an immense advantage to the defence.

<sup>1</sup> Austria also was converted to the principle of the breech-loader, but too late to profit by it in 1866. Writing to his wife, from Vienna, on January 16, 1865, Moltke said, "To me the most noteworthy thing" (in the arsenal he had visited) "is the process of changing the old Austrian muzzle-loaders into breech-loading rifles."

The tactics of the Austrians were largely influenced by excessive reliance upon the bayonet, which necessitated an advance in serried ranks, and provided a splendid target for infantry lying prone, and with a quick-firing rifle. These tactics were the direct result of the war of 1859, where the French had shown the decisive effect of bayonet attacks well carried out, and, unfortunately for Austria, the Danish war of 1864 had not convinced her of the value of the new weapon with which Prussia was armed. It may be taken as certain that Moltke realized that a comparatively weak Prussian detached force armed with the Prussian infantry weapon, and steadied by Prussian fire discipline, would hold its own against an attack by far superior Austrian numbers, until time was gained to relieve the pressure.

Fourthly, there was the Austrian commander von Benedek, who was at this time sixty-six years of age, and had been in command of the Austrian forces in Italy when on April 21 the Emperor sent for him to take over command of the Army of the North.

As a soldier Benedek had proved himself a valuable servant of the state, and, after a successful career in a subordinate position, he had been the only Austrian commander who had fought with success at Solferino. His popularity with the Austrian people was immense, and he was adored by his soldiers, although, among the other Austrian generals of high rank, there were many to whom it was not in the fitness of things to serve under the command of a Protestant of *bourgeois* family. He was a soldier brave, sensible, intelligent, and loyal—almost fanatically so—to his sovereign; but as a commander-in-chief there was one quality lacking, the power of deciding quickly. His character was firm but slow. Given a task to perform he would carry it out with thoroughness and resolution, but if he himself were obliged to give the initial decision his conduct was marked by hesitation and counter-orders. Conscious of his defects he had begged the Emperor to release him from the duty of taking over the supreme command, and had been genuinely grieved when the Emperor refused, on the ground that Austria possessed no greater general. Moltke had made a special study of the war of 1859, and was aware of the many soldierly qualities of

Benedek. But he had not overlooked the failings of the Austrian general. Benedek's capabilities had been accurately diagnosed by the General Staff at Berlin, where on an Austrian order of battle had been inserted opposite his name the curt criticism: "No commander-in-chief nor strategist; will want a deal of assistance in running an army."

On June 8, when, as has been stated, the Prussian strategical concentration may be said to have been completed, it was still supposed that the main Austrian forces were assembling in Bohemia, covered by the Saxons and the 1st Corps. The real truth, however, was soon to be known, for on June 11, a copy of the *ordre de bataille* was received in Berlin, giving exact data as to the strength, composition, and position of Benedek's army. The outstanding feature of the intelligence thus gained was that the Austrian main body was not in Bohemia, but in Moravia, and this fact led to the conclusion at Prussian Headquarters that the Austrian army was about to invade Silesia with Breslau as the first objective. This supposition, which, as a matter of fact, was inaccurate, induced Moltke again to extend the Prussian front, which he had only just succeeded in reducing. The Crown Prince, uneasy about a thrust against Silesia, had asked permission to march forward to take up a position behind the River Neisse. His request was now granted, and by this movement the front of the Prussian armies, which between May 30 and June 8 had been reduced from 276 to 156 miles, was again dangerously extended.

The news that the main Austrian army was concentrating in Moravia led to a feeling of relief at Prussian headquarters, and the statement, made later in the Prussian Official History, that "the danger to Berlin had passed," has provided more than one critic with subject for caustic comment. And the anxiety for Breslau which immediately arose has been even more severely criticized. It is only right, however, that the political aspect of the general situation should be clearly set forth before Moltke's uneasiness is condemned. The war, it must be remembered, was no contest with a hated and hereditary enemy; on the contrary, it was a war against fellow-Germans, and against an empire which had



the whole weight of tradition as the historic head of the Holy Roman Empire of the German people behind it. The war, therefore, lacked the driving power of racial antagonism. Almost up to the last moment popular feeling in Prussia had been strongly against it, and nothing was more likely to nip any warlike feeling in the bud than the spectacle of portions of Prussia invaded, and an important city like Breslau either threatened or actually seized.

In the age of royal professional armies, such sentiments might have been ignored ; but in 1866 the Prussian army, so far as the rank and file was concerned, was the most democratic in Europe. It was not so much that Prussia had a mighty army, as that the army was Prussia. The possibility of being able to call out practically the whole nation in arms had undoubted military advantages, but it imposed, no less, the necessity of deferring to public opinion. The democracy of Prussia had shouldered the burden of universal military service without any real enthusiasm. But it had accepted the sacrifice with a spirit of determination to endure loyally, provided only that success should be attained. To be invaded would be at once regarded as failure, and Moltke must have clearly realized that the whole *moral* of the Prussian military machine would be seriously damaged by such an untoward happening at the outset of the campaign. There was, too, an additional reason for wishing to keep Breslau intact at any cost. From the tide of execration against the possibility of war with Austria that city had stood up like a rock of loyalty to Bismarck's policy, and it would have been a serious political blunder if a city so loyal to the wishes of the ruling caste were to be the first to suffer in the war.

Similarly, the anxiety for the safety of Berlin must be viewed in conjunction with actual facts. To a disciple of Clausewitz like Moltke, the protection of the capital must undoubtedly have seemed a secondary matter compared with the importance of engaging the Austrian army in the field. Nevertheless, there are cases where the question of safeguarding the chief city of a state must come into prominence—indeed Clausewitz himself had distinctly referred to the importance of seizing Paris in 1814 for political

reasons. What has been said above as regards the depressing effect which would have followed an invasion of Silesia applies tenfold to a successful Austrian offensive, which would have led to the fall of Berlin. From the point of view of grand strategy, such an event would have been of strictly minor importance compared with the issue of the real struggle between the rival armies in the field. But the ordinary public of any state is not composed of grand strategists; and, for better or worse, the military system of Prussia had brought it about that the Prussian public was the Prussian army. An army raised by universal military service must always contain an immense number of ordinary men, and a man ceases to be ordinary when he can view the occupation of the capital of his country undismayed.

Again, it must be remembered that, since the days of Clausewitz, strategy had been profoundly influenced by the progress of invention. The introduction of the railway and the telegraph had introduced conditions to which Clausewitz was a stranger, and these inventions had largely affected the importance of capitals. In every state where the metropolis was situated inland, it became at once the natural centre of the railway and telegraph systems of the country. Mechanical progress, in a sense, tended to centralization, and to a centralization located in the capital, so that the effect of its seizure would be far more paralysing than would have been the case in Moltke's younger days. And, finally, it is as certain as anything can be that Moltke had not overlooked the continued tension which had existed for four years both in the North and in the South at threats, or even the threat of a threat, against Washington and Richmond respectively. One of the outstanding lessons to be learnt from that war was that strategy must be in harmony with politics and public opinion, and Moltke was far too shrewd a judge of human nature to fall into the error of ignoring the fact.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—BEGINNING OF THE PRUSSIAN ADVANCE

IT was not until June 15 that Moltke at Berlin was at last enabled to set the Prussian forces in motion. The Army of the Elbe, numbering 46,000 men, stood on the left bank of that river facing Saxony. The 1st Army, under Prince Frederick Charles, consisting of the II<sup>nd</sup>, III<sup>rd</sup>, and IV<sup>th</sup> Corps, occupied the Saxon frontier as far as Görlitz; its approximate strength was 93,000 men. The II<sup>nd</sup> Army, led by the Crown Prince, numbering in all 115,000 men, was about Neisse in Silesia, its units being the 1st, V<sup>th</sup>, and VI<sup>th</sup> Corps, a cavalry division, and later, the Guard Corps. Including a reserve the three armies totalled 278,000 men, and they formed the weapon forged to deliver the decisive blow. For the secondary operation against the other pro-Austrian German states, there was at Minden the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, 14,300 strong, under General von Falckenstein; round Hamburg a force, under Manteuffel, of about 14,100, and at Wetzlar, ready to invade Hesse, was Beyer's division, nearly 20,000 strong.

On the previous day Moltke had been officially informed that the ultimatum sent to Saxony, Hanover, and Cassel would expire at midnight of June 15-16, and accordingly on the 15<sup>th</sup>, before half-past seven in the morning, the wires were busy, and five telegrams were on their way with his instructions. The first was to the commander of the Army of the Elbe, directing him to invade Saxony at 6 A.M. on the 16<sup>th</sup>, and another telegram to headquarters of the 1st Army at Görlitz informed Prince Frederick Charles of this invasion, and directed the Prince to occupy the district



of Lobau with his nearest troops. Austrian territory was, however, not to be invaded without special orders. The remaining three telegrams dealt with operations against Austria's Allies, Falckenstein at Minden and Manteuffel at Altona receiving the King's command to invade Hanover, while Beyer at Wetzlar was similarly directed to march to Cassel. All these movements were to start punctually at 6 A.M. on the 16th, and late at night on the 15th, at the express request of Bismarck, the wires ordered the invading generals "to issue soothing proclamations to inhabitants that we are not coming as enemies."

Moltke, it will be remembered, had laid down that active assistance from Italy was essential to success, but the outlook in that direction was far from reassuring. On June 9 Theodore von Bernhardi had reported to Moltke a conversation he had had with La Marmora, of which the gist was that while Bernhardi pressed for energetic and offensive action of the Italian army, with the object of drawing off considerable Austrian forces from the northern theatre of war, La Marmora had rejected the proposals put to him as too daring. Instead, he proposed to gain possession of the famous Quadrilateral practically by siege, and planned to attack the Austrian forces in front with his main body, while a subordinate army was to advance against the Austrian flank from the Lower Po. At this critical moment Moltke was faced with the possibility of having to do without the active co-operation of Italy, and in a letter to Bernhardi he had to content himself with hoping "that King Victor Emanuel, who is himself both statesman and soldier, will see things in another light, and that at the last decisive moment he will lead his fine and numerous army through the Polesina, will cut through the most important communications of the Quadrilateral, will surround Venice by land and sea, and push on against the heart of the Austrian monarchy."

But, however important was the exact attitude of Italy, it was the main Austrian army which was the key to the whole strategic situation, and it is time now to lift the veil and disclose what was happening across the frontier—always bearing in mind that Moltke had not facts, but

deductions to guide him. Here, indeed, a certain difficulty will be experienced, for authorities differ widely as to the extent of information at Moltke's disposal. The Prussian Official History distinctly states that "the intelligence regarding the Austrian army was various and partly false. It all tended to show that the Austrian 1st Corps, which had been nearest the frontier on both banks of the Elbe, had been reinforced by the 2nd Corps, and that even the Saxon Corps had been added. Further, that the 3rd Corps was marching on Pardubitz, the 8th on Brunn, and the 4th moving in a westerly direction," and as regards a concentration in Northern Bohemia, the history merely contains the statement that "it was at least possible." General Bonnal, however, in his *Sadowa*, is much more definite, for he states that "the corps of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army was scarcely in the positions, ordered on June 12, when the Great General Staff received, on the 19th, positive information that the six Austrian corps grouped round Olmütz were beginning to move towards Bohemia." There is certainly a considerable difference between these two statements, and the difficulty of judging Moltke's strategy of the next few days is, owing to it, very great. On the whole, it does not seem unfair to assign greater credence to the official version. Official histories of campaigns are, indeed, not always immune from error, but the fact that a copy of the Austrian *ordre de bataille* was obtained on June 11 has never been seriously denied by Prussian historians, and there is no apparent reason why the Prussian staff should have wished to conceal another and equally good piece of work by their Intelligence Service.

To turn now from hypothesis to actual fact, by June 10 Clam Gallas, who was in command of the Austrian 1st Corps—to which the 1st Division of Light Cavalry was attached—had been ordered to draw the Saxon Army to himself, to concentrate at Jung Bunzlau, on the Iser, and to fall back upon the Austrian main army which was in Moravia. There the two railways, Vienna—Brunn—Prag, and Vienna—Olmütz—Prag, bifurcating at Lundenburg and meeting again just north of Zwittau, enclose a great oblong of territory, some eighty miles from north to south and with a maximum breadth of forty miles. Inside this space practically the

whole of Benedek's main army, consisting of six corps and four cavalry divisions, was situated.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of this area of concentration had been dictated mainly by political considerations. Austria wished to pose in the eyes of Europe as the injured party, and although there was no outstanding reason of a military nature why she should not have contemplated an offensive either into Silesia, or, after a movement by rail into Saxony, from that country, it was decided to adhere to a policy of defence. The plan had been drawn up by General von Krismanic, and although it would not be correct to say that it contemplated a purely passive defence, the effect of it was completely to surrender the initiative to the Prussians, and no less completely to renounce the chance of profiting by their wide dispersion. Briefly, the plan laid down that it was extremely important that the Austrian army should be based upon a fortress; and for this purpose Olmütz was held to be the most suitable place. Here it was proposed that the decisive battle of the war should be fought, a proposal which, of course, had to take for granted that the Prussian movement would fit in with the Austrian plan. In war such expectations are often apt to remain unfulfilled, and an experienced commander like Benedek can scarcely have overlooked the fact. But he loyally accepted von Krismanic's plan, and its author was selected as his Director of Operations.

However resolute a commander may be in his determination to hold his ground in the hope that events may shape themselves on lines preconceived by him, any movement on the part of the enemy is bound to lead him to consider whether, after all, some modification may not be necessary. This is precisely what happened to Benedek. While the Austrian main army was in process of assembling between the Brunn and Olmütz railways, Benedek began to think that his concentration area was not entirely favourable, and Krismanic was called upon to prepare orders for the event of a possible forward march of the army. He accordingly drew up orders for a march northward to Josefstadt. Hardly had

<sup>1</sup> One of the four cavalry divisions was, however, outside the area enclosed by the railways. This was the 2nd Division of Light Cavalry, which was round Freudenthal in Austrian Silesia.



Prussia's ultimatum to Saxony expired, before Benedek was compelled to decide which of his two plans was to be adopted. At half-past nine on the morning of June 16 he received a telegram from the Emperor informing him that the political situation rendered the immediate commencement of operations extremely desirable. To this message Benedek telegraphed a reply to his imperial master in a vein which clearly shows how, even at this early stage, his will had already been dominated by that of Moltke. Ought he to remain round Olmütz ? or ought he move his army to Josefstadt ? Frankly, Benedek did not know, and in his reply to the Emperor ominous "ifs" appear. "My concentration will be finished on the 20th," he wrote, and "the army will then be ready to fight at Josefstadt in eleven days *if* the enemy's main forces remain in their positions about Görlitz and Landshut, or in four days at Olmütz *if* they are in upper Silesia as seems probable." On the following day information from Vienna satisfied him that the main Prussian force was, after all, on the line Görlitz—Landshut, and, influenced by this intelligence, and probably to some extent by the expected arrival of the Bavarian army in Bohemia, during the 17th he issued orders for the march to Josefstadt. In marked contradistinction to this attitude of waiting upon events was the decision of his opponent. Within a few hours after the expiration of the ultimatum General Herwarth von Bittenfeld crossed the Saxon frontier at the head of the Army of the Elbe, in accordance with Moltke's orders. The Saxon army fell back without resistance, abandoning its territory so as to be able to assist its ally on the decisive field.

The theatre of actual operations was now evidently to be narrowed down to Bohemia. The northern part of Bohemia, the theatre of many great wars, forms a flattened triangle, whose base runs east and west through Prag, and whose sides, the Metal Mountains or Erz Gebirge on the north-west, and the Giant Mountains or Riesen Gebirge on the north-east, meet at an obtuse angle some sixty miles north of that town. Through the mountains the roads available for the movement of armies are few and well defined. Of these, the best known is the great rift which the Elbe has burst for

itself through the Erz Gebirge, from Bohemia into Saxony. On the other side of the triangle there are the three defiles of Parschnitz, Branau, and Nachod, of which the last named is the most famous.

Inside this mountain barrier a second line of defence is formed by the upper waters of the Elbe, and by its tributary the Iser, both of which must be crossed before hostile forces advancing from Saxony and Silesia could effect their junction upon Austrian soil. Speaking generally, foreign writers, better accustomed as they are to the plains of Europe than to the sort of country in which British troops are so often called upon to operate, tend to produce an exaggerated idea of the topographical difficulties which the Prussians had to overcome. On the whole, perhaps, the country on the Bohemian side of the mountains, where the preliminary engagements took place, is not unlike the northern slopes of the borderland which lies between Tweed and Tyne. The foreign hills are higher than our own, but so, too, are the valleys, and it is the relative, not the actual, height of peak and plain which affects military operations.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to correcting the prevalent error as to the topographical difficulties caused by the mountain barrier, it will not be amiss to refer here to a misconception as to the Bohemian frontier generally. The statement is constantly made either by implication or by exact words that Bohemia projected into Prussian territory. The essence of a projection, however, is that it must march on at least two sides with the territory into which the projection is made, but a reference to the map will show that the only frontier common to Bohemia and Prussia was the line, approximately direct, between Görlitz and Glatz. And if this common frontier is extended by including, for strategical consideration, Saxony as an addition to Bohemia, even then there is little to warrant the statement that any real projection into Prussia was made.

The error seems unconsciously to have grown from the impression made by maps published after the exclusion of Austria from the Confederation, and the subsequent creation

<sup>1</sup> Lieut.-Colonel Neill Malcolm, *Bohemia*, 1866, pp. 20 and 21. (*Campaigns and their Lessons Series*.)

of the German Empire in 1871. Into the new Germany thus formed, which included Bavaria and Saxony, but excluded Austria, Bohemia made a very marked projection indeed, marching on three sides with the two former states, and the Prussian territory of Silesia. But in 1866 Bavaria was strategically not a part of Prussia at all, but of Austria, and this circumstance, of course, flattened out the possible projection of Bohemia *plus* Saxony in a decided manner.

Another fallacy which follows as a corollary to the error just noted is the supposed curve of the frontier in 1866, between Prussia and Austria. The terms "arc," "circumference," "semicircle" and "re-entrant frontier" are freely used, and unless the student is careful to keep the map constantly before him he will infallibly drift into the impression that before actual hostilities the Prussian armies were situated on the convex side of an immense curve. The best remedy for such error is a map and ruler. From June 8 onwards the Prussian armies were located generally along a line which had Torgau at one end and Neisse at the other, and if a straight line is drawn connecting these two places, it will be found to lie almost entirely in Prussian territory throughout its course. Unless this factor is borne in mind the difficulties of the Prussians are apt to be considerably exaggerated.

Once across the Elbe the hills cease altogether, and their place is taken by open, rolling plains, where the only obstacles to movement are a few small but marshy streams, and where cavalry, vigorously handled, could have found full scope. Such, in brief, were the topographical features which might have been turned to account by the Austrian army acting, as it elected to do, on the defensive. First, the buffer state of Saxony on the north-west; then the mountain barrier, traversable only at certain well-known points; then the river line of Elbe and Iser, with comparatively few bridges; lastly, the great plain in which the decisive battle was eventually fought.

So far the Prussian plan was working smoothly, and the Army of the Elbe passed through Dresden during June 18, the Saxons retiring without offering any opposition. It was now to be seen that the electric telegraph had its limitations



as regards keeping the Chief of the Staff *au courant* with events in the field. No news reached Moltke from the south throughout the day, and just after midnight of June 18-19, he sent off the following telegram to the Chief of Staff of the Army of the Elbe :

No report arrived. Has General Herwath entered Dresden ? Where are the Saxons ? Have any Austrians joined them ?

The belated information was then wired to Moltke. With the occupation of Saxony the first stage of the campaign was successfully ended. The next step was to be the invasion of Bohemia by the whole army, and Moltke at once proceeded to issue his orders.

The reports which had been coming into the Intelligence Department pointed, in Moltke's words, "to concentration of the Austrian main forces in Bohemia." The Ist Army was to take the offensive there, while the IIInd Army was to draw nearer to it in order to effect a junction with it by an offensive into that state. A Reserve Division was to be left to hold Saxony, while the Army of the Elbe was to be definitely attached to the Ist Army, and its commander was to be placed under the orders of Prince Frederick Charles. The union was to be effected by an advance of the Army of the Elbe on the 20th towards Stolpen, where it would join up with the right wing of the Ist Army, and be absorbed by it. These measures were to a certain extent tentative, but a definite decision was reached upon June 22, when to both armies was sent a telegram in cypher :

His Majesty orders both armies to enter Bohemia and to endeavour to unite about Gitschin. The VIth Corps is to remain available at Neisse.

This was immediately followed by telegraphic instructions to the Crown Prince to the effect that, while the union of the Prussian armies for the decisive battle was to be the end aimed at, the commander of each army, from the moment that he faced the enemy, was to employ the troops entrusted to him according to his own judgment of the requirements of the situation. The contents of the telegram

were repeated to Prince Frederick Charles, commanding the 1st Army, with the additional important instructions :

As the weaker 2nd Army has the more difficult task of issuing from the mountains, it is the more incumbent on the 1st Army, so soon as ever its junction with the force of General von Herwarth has been effected, to shorten the crisis by its swift advance.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—THE STRATEGIC SITUATION ON JUNE 22

By June 22 the war had reached a stage of exceptional interest. To the armies of both powers the respective commanders had assigned a geographical objective. To carry out such orders there was, on the one hand, Austria operating on Austrian soil, with all the consequent advantages to be obtained from movement in friendly country, and operating, broadly speaking, on a single line. On the other hand, there was Prussia on a double line, and definitely committed to invasion of her rival's territory. Before the respective goals assigned to the opposing armies could be reached the clash must come, and the campaign, hitherto bloodless, must be marked by a great battle.

To take the case of Austria first, the question has often been put whether, in view of the start she had gained in mobilization, the initial concentration might not preferably have taken place in Bohemia instead of in Moravia. The Austrian Official Account says on this subject: "With dispositions differing but little from those taken for the concentration in Moravia it would have been quite as easy to have effected concentration in Bohemia, and to have been ready to engage in battle." This dogmatic statement has, however, been by no means universally accepted. It implies a problem over which two generations of students have wrestled in every staff college in Europe. And in appreciating the situation as it existed in 1866, before diplomacy broke down, a threefold *caveat* must be entered. A timely concentration in Bohemia would have necessitated full use of the railways; but railway transport is an extremely



technical subject at all times ; and an attempt to visualize the railway conditions existing over half a century ago is almost an impossibility. The fact that, with the exception of a short section north of Vienna, all the Austrian railways were single lines is of course known, but the amount of rolling-stock, its capabilities and its situation in May 1866, the crossing places, the entraining and detraining facilities at the various stations, the quality of the railway personnel—these and half a hundred other technical points are not completely known ; and unless they are so known the whole railway question involved by a concentration in Bohemia becomes mere guesswork. In the second place, it is sometimes forgotten that the political factor ruled such a concentration out of court. And in the third place, it should not be overlooked, though it very often is, that just as Moltke got wind of the belated attempt at concentration in Bohemia, he would probably have gathered tidings about an earlier one with no less accuracy.

At first sight it might appear as if Benedek held an advantage over Moltke in that the bulk of his army was concentrated and under his own hand ; but against this must be set the fact that the Austrians were committed to a flank march, unpleasantly near the Prussian left wing. The fighting troops of the Austrians were moving in three columns, and the right column which marched by Opocno consisted of four corps and two cavalry divisions upon one road. This led to a considerable number of checks, with the consequent exhaustion of the troops, a state of things which was aggravated by inadequate supply arrangements, and by intensely hot weather. The railway, too, was used merely for the transport of part of the headquarters staff, some engineer units, and for supplies ; and even though the exact facilities are not known there does not seem any reason why a portion, at any rate, of the fighting troops might not have been thus conveyed. These factors on the Austrian side certainly detracted from any advantage Benedek might have been assumed to hold, and as regards actual concentration, in the sense of readiness for fighting, the Austrian situation was by no means excellent. On the 22nd the Austrian units were strung out throughout the whole of the area Reichanau—

Prossnitz—Sternberg,<sup>1</sup> and it is doubtful whether on that day they were, for practical purposes, much more concentrated than the forces of their opponents.

Another item which seriously discounted the Austrian chances was the attitude of Bavaria. On June 10 the Chief of the Bavarian Staff had started for Vienna and Olmütz in order to consult about operations in the event of war with Prussia. Four days later an agreement was signed to the effect that Bavaria would co-operate with Austria, and, although she would look first to the protection of her own territory, such protection would not be allowed to militate against close union with the Austrian army. In spite of public opinion in Munich, which demurred at this subordination of private interests to the general cause, an arrangement was come to that not only the Saxons, but also the Bavarians, should be ordered into Bohemia, so as to concentrate as great a force as possible at the decisive point. The Saxons, as has already been related, loyally observed their undertaking, but on June 18 Benedek received the news from Vienna that the Bavarian Government had categorically refused to allow its troops to march into Bohemia, and, not unnaturally, any latent desire of Benedek for acting on the offensive was somewhat damped by this occurrence.

To a certain extent the defection of Bavaria was compensated for by good work by the Austrian Intelligence Department. On the 20th Benedek received important information concerning the dislocation of the Prussian armies. Hitherto he had believed that the II<sup>nd</sup> Army, commanded by the Crown Prince of Prussia, consisted solely of the V<sup>th</sup> and VI<sup>th</sup> Corps, of whose march to the Neisse he knew. But intercepted copies of telegrams passing between the Prussian commanders now revealed the fact that the Guard Corps, a cavalry division, and the I<sup>st</sup> Corps formed part of the Crown Prince's army. Further, it was clear that there was in progress a movement westward from the Neisse towards Waldenburg and Landshut, that the ultimate destination of the I<sup>st</sup> Corps was Hirschberg, and that Prince Frederick Charles at Görlitz was anxiously awaiting

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed dislocation see the Austrian Official Account (French Translation, *Les Luittes d'Autriche*), vol. iii. p. 20.

news of its arrival, in order to begin his operations with the 1st Army. This information confirmed the view that the march of the Vth and VIth Corps to the Neisse had been a mere blind, and that part of the IIInd Army would shortly enter the passes leading to Trautenau and Nachod. On learning this Benedek issued revised orders for the later stages of the march, which was now slightly accelerated. The main body of the army, four corps, was to assemble on the arc Josefstadt—Schurz—Miletin—Horitz. One Corps, the 8th, was to be in reserve. To the north and north-east the frontier passes were to be watched by cavalry, supported by the 2nd Corps. But in spite of the acceleration of the march programme, the leading corps would not reach Josefstadt till the 25th, and the rear corps could not come to hand till four days later.

It must have been obvious to the Austrian commander that his one real chance was to effect the concentration of his main body before the two wings of the Prussian forces should close round him, and everything pointed to the absolute necessity of holding off the enemy for at least a few days. Properly handled, the topography of the theatre of war was not unfavourable to him. The quadrilateral formed by the Sudeten, the Iser, and the Elbe was an area which lent itself to delaying action east and west. For if Prince Frederick Charles advanced from Lusatia along the southern base of the Riesengebirge in order to effect a union with the Crown Prince, he would very soon arrive at the western bank of the Iser, and there would find an obstacle in his path, which might easily be defended. On the other hand, the passes through which the Crown Prince must enter Bohemia formed a difficulty for the invaders. These three passes were separated from each other by some 15 or 20 miles, and between them lateral communication—which was confined to a few rough country tracks—was extremely difficult; and further they opened upon the eastern bank of the Upper Elbe. So that, quite apart from the difficulties of the defiles, the junction of the two Prussian armies would necessitate the successful passage of two rivers, and the Austrian commander enjoyed a distinct tactical advantage from the possession of the fortresses of Josefstadt and Königgrätz upon one of them.



At the same time it is possible to overrate some of these unquestioned advantages, and, as a matter of fact, they have frequently been so overrated and not least by Prussian writers. It is impossible when reading in some accounts of the passage of the Crown Prince's columns into Bohemia to escape wholly the impression that the passes had exits like tunnels, capable of being held against an invader by mere handfuls of men. As a matter of fact the passes descend into Bohemia much less steeply than they rise up on the northern side, and like many European defiles they do not cease abruptly, but fade away in fold after fold, so that it is difficult to see exactly where the defile ends, and correspondingly difficult to hold the exit with a small detaining force to the best advantage.

Nevertheless, whatever the actual difficulties of the defiles and of the Elbe as obstacles to the invading armies, it was Benedek's business to exploit them to the uttermost, even if but for a few days. In this he signally failed. In his orders of June 17, which announced the move to Josefstadt, the flank protection ordered was little more than local, for the orders merely laid down that the right column should have mobile flank guards—the mere ordinary precautions of a march in such circumstances—while the movement generally was to be covered by a division of light cavalry. It is true that the 2nd Corps had also a covering mission, but its scope was merely to protect the army from a possible Prussian irruption from the direction of Glatz. Even on June 20, when the intercepted telegrams threw up in bold relief the probability of a hostile advance through the defiles of Trautenau and Nachod, Benedek contented himself with sending a regiment of dragoons to the line Starkenbach—Trautenau, while the 1st Reserve Cavalry Division was posted at Skalitz, with detachments thrown out to Nachod and to the right and left of that town. From such a force observation was all that could reasonably be expected, for the resistance which could be offered by the Austrian cavalry was not likely to be very strong.

And yet the railway facilities for hurrying forward a comparatively strong force of all arms were apparently good. From the original area of concentration round Olmütz two

railways led to Trübau and, uniting there, led by a single line through Pardubitz and Königgrätz, past Nachod to near Eipel, which is but a few miles from the mouth of the Trautenau defile. Although it has earlier been suggested that, without a complete knowledge of the Austrian railway arrangements of 1866, it is difficult to lay down with certainty what might or might not have been accomplished, still the railway facilities of that day must have been inconceivably bad if a division at least could not have been on its way by rail to the passes, certainly by June 21. This detaining force could then have been reinforced by the first units to arrive by march route in the Josefstadt area.

The failure of Benedek to deal adequately with the possible eventualities in the Sudeten was not relieved by his action on the Iser. The Saxons, instead of falling back upon the Austrian main body as had originally been intended, were to join Clam Gallas on the left bank of the Iser, where, however, the combined forces were to act as little more than a corps of observation. The Crown Prince of Saxony and Clam Gallas had arranged with Benedek's approval to move the Saxon army by rail to Prelautsch, whence it could march to Chulmetz, with the intention of uniting with the main army about Josefstadt; but on the 22nd, before half the troops reached Chulmetz, the Crown Prince and Clam Gallas were instructed to collect all their troops at Jung-Bunzlau and Münchengrätz. To anticipate slightly, the command of the two corps was given to the Crown Prince of Saxony, whose orders were to withdraw to the eastward should the enemy appear in superior strength. But if ever there was an occasion in war where the gaining of time was important to a commander it was June 20, 1866, and the days immediately following, when it was everything for Benedek to effect his concentration in Bohemia before the Prussians could disturb it. Conversely, to be delayed would be extremely dangerous for Moltke. It has been seen from his message to Prince Frederick Charles that what Moltke most feared was the failure of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army to debouch from the mountains, and that, to lessen the danger, the I<sup>st</sup> Army was to press forward against the enemy's left. Moltke's earnest endeavour was "to shorten the crisis,"

that is, to avoid delay. But though the importance of speed for the Prussians must have been clear to the Austrian commander, instead of encouraging his troops to throw every obstacle in the way of Prince Frederick Charles, he deliberately ordered them to retire.

In short, the troops left on the Iser were too many for observation, and they were not intended to fight. And so by his failure to adopt measures which would for a time hold off the Prussians on either flank, Benedek was faced with the probability of having to forgo the opportunity of throwing himself with the bulk of his forces against one of the two advancing wings of the Prussians, and effectually crushing it before the other could come to its aid. Worse still, he now ran the risk of finding himself in the awkward position of being soon between two fires. In a word, from being an exponent of the advantage of interior over exterior lines he was likely to become the victim of envelopment.

Yet, so little does Benedek appear to have appreciated the importance of the time factor that on June 20 he wrote: "So soon as I am established at Josefstadt, and after a few days of rest, which is absolutely indispensable, I propose to assume the offensive." Yet he knew that his various corps could not be concentrated until the 29th, and, in the circumstances, however important it was to rest his troops, it was absolutely vital to ensure that the oncoming Prussians should have been delayed during that brief period. For this, however, Benedek failed completely to take adequate measures, and by June 22 it is scarcely too much to say that he had already gone far towards losing the war.

To turn now from Benedek to Moltke. The question to be answered is whether the plan of uniting the two wings of the Prussian army at a point in Central Bohemia was the best solution of the problem which confronted the Prussian Chief of the Staff. It has certainly received severe strictures from friend and foe. Many French writers condemn it strongly. The Swiss Colonel Lecomte, a former aide-de-camp of Jomini, wrote: "Since war was first waged seldom have such masses been placed in a more ghastly situation. The historical blunder of the Austrian commanders advancing, in 1796, to the relief of Mantua in three columns—a



blunder so thoroughly punished by Bonaparte—was at any rate a strategic masterpiece compared with the Prussian plan of 1866,” and within a few days of Moltke’s decision, the old retired General Willisen, the rival of Clausewitz, thus wrote to a friend : “ All that can be said of the movements now being executed is, that they repair the worst fault that could have been committed—dissemination of forces in two widely separated groups.”

But although Moltke’s action has been frequently condemned as exceeding the necessary limits of safety, it is impossible to accept these strictures without question. On June 19 he had received the news, at Berlin, that the Austrian main army had begun to move from the Olmütz region towards Bohemia, and, with the existing dissemination of the Prussian forces—a dissemination which it will be remembered had been forced upon Moltke—there was the possibility that Benedek might be able to place his army in a central position from which he could operate on interior lines against either of the Prussian armies in turn. Moltke knew well the theoretical advantage of interior lines, but he knew also their limitations, and his words on the subject in the Prussian Official History are of considerable interest :

To profit by the inner line of operations, it is necessary to have enough space to enable the army thus situated to have a sufficient zone of manœuvre to enable it to seek one of the opposing armies *at a distance of several days’ march*, and also to be free to countermarch to meet the other. If this space is too constricted, there is the risk of having to deal with both adversaries at once. When an army on the field of battle is attacked in front and flank, the possession of the inner line is of little practical value, and its strategical advantage may become a tactical drawback.

Holding these opinions it was clearly Moltke’s obvious duty to use every endeavour to limit Benedek’s zone of manœuvre as completely and as quickly as possible. And, had he not adopted the scheme of endeavouring to concentrate at Gitschin, the only course open to him, to ensure the necessary union of his forces, would have been to retire the Crown Prince’s army to Landshut, and to bring it into Bohemia on the left of the 1st Army, which would wait for it

on the Iser. This movement, according to the late General Bonnal, would, however, have taken ten or twelve days at least, and would undoubtedly have played into Benedek's hands. The French critic indeed commits himself to the statement that "Moltke's solution of June 19, however rash in appearance, was in reality wise. Extraordinary circumstances call for extreme measures, or, if we prefer to put it so, when one is compelled to choose between two evils, one chooses the lesser." Coming from the greatest exponent of the Napoleonic theory of war, these words, used in a criticism upon an operation thoroughly anti-Napoleonic in form, must necessarily carry great weight. And the view taken by Moltke himself may suitably be inserted here.<sup>1</sup>

The timely junction of the Prussian armies in the war of 1866 has never been represented—at least by our General Staff—as a stroke of genius or a brilliant idea. It was merely an expedient and a remedy chosen skilfully, and applied with vigour for a situation inherently defective, but unavoidable.

This carries weight, too; still there is no reader with a knowledge of military history but will find himself putting the question, What would have happened to Moltke had he stumbled against a Napoleon or a Lee?

In forming an opinion of Moltke's strategy at this time there is, however, one point which must not be lost sight of, namely, the fact that he was somewhat in error as to the area of concentration of the Austrian main army. This is borne out by the record of Moltke himself, for in writing to Stulpnagel on June 23, he stated, "The Austrians are in full march towards the north. The point is to *reach the Iser before them*." From this it would seem that Moltke imagined that Benedek was heading for a goal considerably to the west of the area Miletin—Horitz—Schurz—Josefstadt, and any doubt upon this conjecture is removed by a letter addressed by him the following day to the Chief of Staff of the IIInd Army, Blumenthal. In this Moltke writes:

The Intelligence is in a bad way in spite of all our trouble. *If it proves true that the Austrians are concentrating at Jung-*

<sup>1</sup> *Militär Wochenblatt*, April 17, 1867. The author is now known to have been Moltke.

*Bunzlau* (on the Iser), the union of our army would be assured if only the advance from both sides is quick.

This evidence may reasonably be held to prove not only that in carrying out the Prussian concentration at Gitschin Moltke was unaware that Benedek was forming up round Josefstadt, but also that, in imagining the Austrians to be heading for Jung-Bunzlau, he considered that the Prussians might effect their junction by anticipating the enemy; in other words, without a fight. This is an important point, and one which has not perhaps received the attention it deserves. According to Duval,<sup>1</sup> Moltke, as late as June 24, imagined that the main body of the Austrians was in process of being transported by the railway line Pardubitz—Prag—München-grätz; and had this been the case the converging march of the two wings of the Prussian army towards Gitschin would have been a distinctly tamer project than the same operation carried out with Benedek, as was actually the case, forming up round Josefstadt.

The Intelligence Service, in this instance, placed Moltke in a distinctly risky position. Right up to the end of June it was a service which was but half improvised. On the 24th Moltke himself admits that "the Intelligence is in a bad way," and the evidence of a credible witness shows that at the outbreak of the war there was much which had to be done. In his memoirs General von Caprivi, who served in 1866 as a captain in the Intelligence Department, wrote:

Everything had to be created in 1866. Although two years earlier we might have had to contend with the Austrians, we had very little information as to the dislocation of their various corps when war broke out.

Mention of the service of information necessarily opens up the question of the employment of the Prussian cavalry for securing intelligence. As the "eyes and ears" of the Prussian army the mounted branch was a distinct failure, and the strategical weakness of the handling of the Prussian cavalry was a marked feature of the opening phases of the war. In the operations yet to be described the cavalry on

<sup>1</sup> *Vers Sadowa*, p. 152.



many occasions actually followed in rear of the infantry, a fact which led a German historian <sup>1</sup> to utter the tart comment that "the invariable result was a game of blind-man's buff with the enemy." Here it will be sufficient merely to allude to an incident of the early days of the campaign. Dresden had been entered by Prussian troops on June 18, and the Army of the Elbe was resting on the following day. During the afternoon a rumour flew round that enemy troops were within half a day's march of the city, and some considerable excitement was caused. The information, which was, as a matter of fact, false, was given by a German commercial traveller, and the fact that it should have gained even a grain of credence is a tribute to the poor estimation in which both the scouting and resisting power of the Prussian cavalry were held.

The weakness of the Intelligence service, and the feeble employment of the cavalry during the period of playing for an opening, undoubtedly increased Moltke's difficulties to a marked extent; but it may perhaps without unfairness be urged that the unready state of an important department, and the faulty handling of the arm which is the most important one at the opening of a war, do, in some measure, reflect on the Chief of the Staff who had been the virtual commander of the Prussian army since 1858.

<sup>1</sup> Von Schlichting.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—OPERATIONS ON THE ISER, JUNE 22–27 INCLUSIVE—THE GENERAL POSITION IN THE WHOLE THEATRE OF WAR ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 27—THE PRUSSIAN 1ST ARMY REACHES GITSCHIN DURING THE NIGHT OF JUNE 29–30.

WITH the issue of the orders of June 22 the die was cast, and the fate of Prussia hung on the value of the throw. The week which followed was to be one full of anxiety for Moltke, and the ultimate startling and rapid triumph he achieved is apt to overshadow the difficulties he had to face. The main issue was of course the union of the two wings of the main Prussian army inside Austrian territory; but over and above this, though certainly subsidiary to it in importance, were the struggle in western Germany and the war between Austria and Italy.

On the evening of the 22nd of June the Prussian 1st Army, under Prince Frederick Charles, lay in cantonments astride the Prusso-Saxon frontier, and facing Reichenberg, while the Army of the Elbe was on the march towards Gabel. On the following day Prince Frederick Charles moved forward in march formation, and on the 24th shots were exchanged with Austrian cavalry. The order of Moltke to the commander of the 1st Army, issued on the 22nd, had concluded with the words, "The 1st Army must by its rapid advance shorten the crisis," but Prince Frederick Charles was considerably hampered by the divisional organization, which had hastily been substituted in the 1st Army for the more tried corps system. He had endeavoured to comply with the order urging the necessity for speed by assigning a separate road to each division; but on the 24th the number of separate

routes was insufficient, and divisions had to follow one another by the same road, with the result that the trains and parks of one division delayed the march of that following in rear. This necessarily militated against rapidity, and the drawback was not lightened by the fact that under the direct order of Prince Frederick Charles were now twelve units,<sup>1</sup> to every one of which orders had daily to be sent.

By this time the Austrian 1st Corps and the Saxons were drawn up behind the Iser, and at 1.50 P.M. on the 24th Benedek sent off a telegram to the Crown Prince of Saxony directing him to take command of Clam Gallas's corps in addition to his own. The message also contained intelligence to the effect that Benedek was contemplating delivering his main blow against the Prussian 1st Army, but that the Crown Prince of Saxony was to fall back upon the Austrian main body in case of attack by an enemy in great numerical superiority. Prince Albert therefore brought his Saxons nearer to Münchengrätz, where Clam Gallas had already stationed the 1st Corps, and suggested that the latter should hold the line thence to Turnau. Clam Gallas, however, opposed this on the ground that the situation at Turnau was unfavourable, and the Saxon Crown Prince allowed himself to be persuaded against his better judgment.

Nightfall on June 25 found the Prussian 1st Army massed round Reichenberg, where it was in close touch with the Army of the Elbe. According to the information which he had received Prince Frederick Charles believed that the Iser was held not only by Clam Gallas and the Saxons but by the 2nd Austrian Corps as well. In spite of the orders as to the necessity of speed, the commander of the 1st Army now felt that it would be wise to reconnoitre carefully towards Liebenau and Münchengrätz. The troops making for the former place were fired on by Austrian cavalry, but these were soon driven back. Turnau was found to be unoccupied, and the important crossing place there fell into Prussian hands almost without a blow.

The Crown Prince of Saxony now doubtless regretted that he had allowed himself to be overruled by Clam Gallas, and

<sup>1</sup> Six divisions of the 1st Army, four divisions of the Army of the Elbe the Cavalry Corps, and the Reserve Artillery.



his regret was certainly accentuated by a telegram he received from the commander-in-chief about three o'clock in the afternoon, with orders to "hold Turnau and Münchengrätz at all costs." Turnau, however, was already gone, and the first question was how could the loss be retrieved. A vigorous night attack against Liebenau proved of no avail; soon after midnight victory was with the Prussians, and the passage over the Iser at this point was also won. The Prussian losses were 18 officers and 118 men, that of the Austrians nearly 500, in addition to 550 prisoners—a significant index, not only of the value of the needle-guns but of the superior training and leading of the victors. The position of the Saxon Crown Prince upon the Iser was now clearly untenable, and it was practically incumbent for him to withdraw his two corps to Gitschin while there was yet time. Accordingly, at 11 P.M. on the 27th, a brigade of Austrian infantry went off to the eastward and took up a rearguard position astride the Turnau—Gitschin road so as to protect the northern flank of the retirement of the army, a movement which was to begin early on the following day. Fortunately for the Crown Prince of Saxony, the 27th was a day of almost perfect quiet; for Prince Frederick Charles, who now realized that he was opposed merely by two corps, instead of pouring his army through the *trouée* Turnau—Podol, spent the whole day in making elaborate arrangements for an attack on Münchengrätz on the 28th.

Although, so far as has been narrated, the orders which Moltke issued on June 22 were apparently working smoothly, in reality during the evening of the 27th he must have spent the most anxious hours of his sixty-six years of life. In an earlier chapter the importance not only of victory but of a speedy victory has been pointed out, but by the 27th there was nothing in the advance so far made by Prince Frederick Charles towards such essential. Although he had been urged to use all speed, his army had barely made ten miles in five days, and the insignificant affair at Podol had been sufficient to induce him to lose a whole day in changing from march to battle formation, and to contemplate a frontal attack upon Münchengrätz. It is true that this attack was to be supplemented with an enveloping movement against

the Austrian right, but a general with a bolder conception of war would probably have merely masked Münchengrätz, and have poured, and poured rapidly, every available man through the gap which had been yielded to him almost without a blow.

Prince Frederick Charles was an obstinate and imperious commander, impatient of superior control. At an earlier stage of his career Moltke had reported favourably of his abilities as displayed on staff tours of the Great General Staff, but had stated bluntly that the Prince offended his officers by his rude manners and overbearing disposition. Already he was hampering Moltke's plans. On receiving the order of the 22nd, in which he was specifically told that since the weaker IIInd Army had the more difficult task the Ist Army was "to shorten the crisis by its swift advance," Prince Frederick Charles had telegraphed to ask for the Ist Corps to be given to him—he had five—as he was "too weak to meet the Austrian forces assembling in Bohemia," and this, although the previous day Moltke had definitely informed him that the Ist Corps belonged to the IIInd Army. To the request of Prince Frederick Charles for that corps Moltke had replied by telegraph, emphasizing the point that "only a vigorous advance of the Ist Army can disengage the IIInd," and ending with the statement, not without sting, that "100,000 men with Prince Frederick Charles at their head, and a reserve of 50,000 men a day's march behind them, have the greatest chance of victory." By the evening of the 27th, five days after the order impressing the necessity of speed by the Ist Army had been issued, Moltke had certainly every ground to be disappointed with the slow progress of Prince Frederick Charles. June 25 had been the date on which Moltke had hoped that the Ist Army and the Army of the Elbe would be at Gitschin, but by the 27th the bulk of these two armies was still on the wrong side of the Iser.

The progress of Prince Frederick Charles undoubtedly was discounting the possibility of an early victory, and on the eastern frontier of Bohemia there was even the possibility of defeat to be faced. There the difficult task of the IIInd Army in debouching from the mountains had led to the defeat of one of the columns, with the result that the Ist Corps was

driven back from Trautenau, and did not halt until it had recrossed the frontier and had reached its bivouacs of the previous night. By the evening of the 27th, Moltke, indeed, had not received this alarming news in full, but during the day intelligence of sufficiently disquieting import had reached Berlin, for the Crown Prince had telegraphed to the King that he was without news of the 1st Corps and the 1st Division of the Guards. The tale of the operations during the 27th on the eastern frontier of Bohemia will be found in the succeeding chapter, but it is necessary to anticipate it here so as to bring all the tidings of that day into one focus.

Another factor which can scarcely have failed to disquiet Moltke was the uncertainty as to the situation of the Austrian main army. The evidence from the Iser and from the eastern frontier of Bohemia showed clearly that the assumption that the Austrians were concentrating at Jung-Bunzlau had no foundation in fact, and although this was so much to the good, inasmuch as one possible solution was eliminated, nevertheless it requires an exceptional commander to be able to frame a new and working conjecture without an instant's delay.

The anxiety in the office of the Chief of the Staff in Berlin was not, however, limited to the operations in Bohemia. In Hanover an incident had occurred which was extremely galling, and capable of producing a strong moral effect unfavourable to Prussia. The imperfectly prepared Hanoverian army was scarcely a match for a single Prussian division, and the only course open to it was to march southwards to Bavaria ; but partly by remissness, and partly by gross disregard of Moltke's explicit orders, it came about that on the 27th a Prussian force had to attack the Hanoverians at Langensalza, although they had 17,000 men to 6000 on the Prussian side. As a result the Prussians were thoroughly beaten and had to retreat with a loss of 800 killed and wounded and as many prisoners. The effect of the victory was, it is true, momentary. The Hanoverians were short of ammunition and supplies, and capitulated two days later. Nevertheless the defeat was an exasperating piece of news for a Chief of the Staff who was anxiously



awaiting the execution of a delicate manœuvre on the principal front.

Lastly, there had been grave news from Italy—from Italy whose intervention as an ally to Prussia had been a cardinal factor of Moltke's plan of campaign.<sup>1</sup> On June 23, the day on which Victor Emmanuel had notified that he would begin hostilities, his army crossed the Mincio a few miles south of Lake Garda. On the same day the Austrian Archduke Albrecht marched his army through Verona and across the Adige, and on the 24th continued the march into the hilly country to the south-east of Lake Garda, where it wheeled to the left and struck the flank of the Italians heading south-east. The Italian left wing was driven from the hills between Custozza and the Mincio, and the rest of the army, paralysed by a charge of the Austrian cavalry, had to save itself by a hasty retreat. The victory of the Austrians was complete, and although there was another Italian army south of the Po, there was a distinct possibility that before long the Archduke might be able to transfer the bulk of his victorious forces to the principal front of the war.

Imperturbable and unswerving, the master mind of Moltke refused to be daunted by this succession of mishaps, and even though further irritating news arrived on the following day, he dealt with it with characteristic calm. On the 28th Prince Frederick Charles telegraphed to Berlin for permission to halt and rest next day. Most of his troops had not as yet been engaged; he had fought no serious battle; and his progress so far had been extremely slow. Moltke replied in a telegram despatched at 1 P.M., in which he gave Prince Frederick Charles a brief précis of the situation of the Crown Prince, and ended with the polite intimation that "the complete debouchment of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army will be materially facilitated by the advance of the I<sup>st</sup> Army." The King, however, felt that the moment for courteous aphorisms had passed, and at 7.30 A.M. on the 29th he caused a more explicit message to be telegraphed to his nephew. It ran as follows: "His Majesty expects that the I<sup>st</sup> Army by a more rapid advance will disengage the II<sup>nd</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 91.

Army, which, in spite of a series of victorious actions, is still for the moment in a difficult situation." By this time Prince Frederick Charles had lost touch with the retreating enemy, except for a cavalry skirmish near Gitschin, and for some reason, in spite of the insistent telegram from the King, no movement was made until after midday.

At dawn on the 28th the two corps of the Crown Prince of Saxony had resumed their retreat and had thus got many hours' start of the Prussian Ist Army. At this time, in spite of the serious situation on the eastern frontier of Bohemia, Benedek's plan was to move with the bulk of his forces to the Iser, and during the day the Crown Prince of Saxony received a telegram to the effect that he would be joined at Gitschin on the 30th by Benedek, and that Austrian General Headquarters would then be fixed in that town. Only two corps were to be left to oppose the Prussian II<sup>nd</sup> Army in the mountains, and the remainder of the army, concentrating round Josefstadt, would be put in motion towards Gitschin on the 29th. As a matter of fact, before the despatch containing this information reached the Crown Prince of Saxony, another plan had been forced upon the Austrian commander-in-chief. But Prince Albert knew nothing of the change, and he accordingly took up a position covering Gitschin against the Prussian Ist Army.

The Prussians advanced in three columns, and about four in the afternoon, when the Austrian troops in Gitschin were preparing their evening meal, picquets rushing in reported the approach of the enemy along the Turnau road. This was the Prussian 5th Division under von Tümppling, which quickly became engaged, and about 6 o'clock its line had become so extended as to render its position somewhat precarious. The Prussian 4th Division was, however, hurrying to the assistance of the hard-pressed 5th, and to the south of the Prywicin heights the 3rd Division was pushing on with all possible speed. Still the position of the Prussians was one of danger, and there was the possibility that von Tümppling's Division might be broken before the divisions co-operating could intervene. It was, however, not destined to come to this, for about half-past seven an officer from Benedek's headquarters came to the Crown Prince of

Saxony with instructions to avoid any contest with an enemy in superior numbers, and to effect a junction with the main army *via* Horitz and Miletin.

The Crown Prince of Saxony now found that all his calculations must go by the board, and he was called upon to carry out the task of breaking off an action in the face of an unbeaten enemy, and of retreating in darkness through the narrow streets of a town, without having made any preliminary arrangements. About 9 P.M. orders were issued for a general retreat, and soon scenes of considerable confusion were to be witnessed. In the hope of being able to restore order and to facilitate the retreat of the Saxons, Clam Gallas decided to halt in Gitschin with his own corps until 3 A.M. on the 30th. The troops were mostly out of the town by 10 o'clock, and Clam Gallas kept his headquarters at the city hall, busy with arrangements for the following day. Suddenly a number of officers rushed into Clam's room with cries of "The Prussians are here." The general would not believe the news, but soon the report was confirmed by events. A hurried retreat ensued in which the 1st Corps was thrown into hopeless disorder. The Saxons were more fortunate, and had suffered less, and, with some show of cohesion, marched through the night southwards towards Smidar. In the course of the forenoon of the 30th two Austrian brigades arrived at Miletin, where the Archduke Ernest was encamped with the 3rd Corps, and there found temporary rest and protection. The bulk of them, however, assembled at Horitz, and in the afternoon the forlorn retreat of the wreck of the Austrian 1st Corps was continued to Sadowa, and the following day shelter was finally reached, under the guns of Königgrätz.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—THE PASSAGE OF THE PRUSSIAN IIND ARMY THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

WITH the arrival of Prince Frederick Charles at Gitschin half of Moltke's plan for the union of the two wings of the Prussian army had been accomplished, and it is now time to see how the IInd Army, with its admittedly more difficult task, had been faring. On the 22nd the Crown Prince had received the King's order to prepare to assume the offensive in Bohemia, in order to join the Ist Army in the direction of Gitschin, and on June 26, the day on which the army of Prince Frederick Charles had its first brush with the enemy west of the Iser, the IInd Army was ready to advance.<sup>1</sup> The staff of the Crown Prince knew that the Austrian 1st Corps and the Saxons were opposing Prince Frederick Charles on the Iser, and a demonstration made by the Crown Prince's VIth Corps on the 24th had led to the Austrian 2nd Corps being detained near the frontier. It was then easy to deduce that only four Austrian corps could oppose the Prussian IInd Army in its issue from the mountains. But even in these circumstances the march through the passes would be an operation of considerable difficulty and danger.

<sup>1</sup> Its position then was :

#### Ist Corps :

1st Division	.	.	.	Liebau.
2nd Division	.	.	.	Schomberg.

#### Guard Corps :

1st Division	.	.	.	Dittersbach.
2nd Division	.	.	.	Pickau.

Vth Corps	.	.	.	Reinerz.
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#### VIth Corps :

11th Division	.	.	.	Glatz.
12th Division	.	.	.	Landeck.

Cavalry Division	.	.	.	Waldenburg.
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For the passage of the IInd Army three roads were to be used, leading to Trautenau, Braunau, and Nachod respectively. In the first and last of these passages the roads were good, though that to Nachod led through a defile five miles in length, and it was only beyond Nachod that the troops who marched through it could deploy. The pass to Braunau in the centre had the advantage that the Bohemian frontier here formed a small but pronounced salient, twenty miles in depth, and in consequence of this geographical configuration it was the least likely to be blocked by the enemy, and, consequently, the troops using it were the least likely to be interfered with while debouching. This was of considerable importance to the Prussians, and here fortune favoured the Crown Prince. It had been supposed that, on emerging from Braunau, only one road would be discovered, namely that which led to Trautenau, but a tourist had revealed the information that a second road, of good quality, ran almost due south to Nachod, and thus the Guards would be in a position to reinforce right or left. As for the general arrangements for the passage of the mountains, they were as follows: the Crown Prince had decided to send the Ist Corps, followed by the cavalry, by the right-hand pass to Trautenau. On the left flank, the Vth Corps, to be followed later by the VIth, was to make good Nachod. The Guard Corps was to be in the centre with Eipel as its objective, and on leaving Braunau the 1st Guard Division was to bear to the right towards the Ist Corps, while the 2nd Guard Division was to continue straight on as far south as a fork in the road, whence it could either continue south to assist Steinmetz if necessary, or bear westwards to Eipel.

On the evening of the 26th the head of the Guard Division crossed the frontier under the Crown Prince in person, the troops cheering loudly as they stepped on Austrian soil. A little beyond the frontier patrols of Guard Uhlans had a successful skirmish with Austrian cavalry posts, and the Guards bivouacked for the night a few miles beyond Braunau.

At 3 o'clock on the morning of June 27 General von Bonin, commanding the Ist Corps, had got his troops into march formation, and at 4 A.M. they began their march towards the mountains. The Ist Corps marched at first by

two roads, one division by each, with instructions to unite at Parschnitz, a half-hour's march from Trautenau, from which point the right column would provide the advanced guard for the united corps. Unfortunately, the right-hand column was delayed, with the result that although Parschnitz was reached by the left division at 8 o'clock, it was nearly two hours later before the right column arrived. The advance was then continued towards Trautenau, which lies in a deep valley through which the little river Aupa flows first toward the east and then with a sharp turn towards the south. Close behind the town rise several ridges with steep slopes accessible only by a narrow ravine. The highest of these, the Kapellenberg, is crowned by an abrupt rocky cliff. Towards the south the descent takes the form of a rolling plateau, the eastern border of which sinks nearly vertically and pathless to the Aupa, while the western side falls away gradually to the Upper Elbe. On arriving at Trautenau the head of the Prussian advanced guard found that the bridge over the Aupa was held by Austrian cavalry, though not in great strength. After sharp street fighting the town remained in the hands of the Prussians, but on issuing from it they were received by a sustained fire from the heights south of the place.

The fire came from a brigade of the Austrian 10th Corps, consisting of seven battalions with eight guns. On the 26th Benedek's main army was still straggling over forty miles of country, but although the movements of the Prussian II<sup>nd</sup> Army had been sufficiently accurately reported, Benedek contented himself with sending the 6th Corps, strengthened by the 1st Light Cavalry Division, to Skalitz, with directions to send an advanced guard towards Nachod, while the 10th Corps was to occupy Trautenau, and to push forward an advanced guard too. It still seemed possible to the Austrian commander-in-chief to effect his proposed concentration at Josefstadt, although it must have been fairly obvious by this that, even if such concentration should be brought about, the zone of manœuvre had been so narrowed down as to have deprived him almost entirely of any advantage inherent in interior lines. What is even more curious is that Benedek should still have thought it possible to continue the



plan of moving the bulk of his force towards the Iser, where, united with the Crown Prince of Saxony, he intended to hurl himself against the army of Prince Frederick Charles.

During the evening of the 26th he wrote to the chief aide-de-camp of the Emperor: "These dispositions are merely a temporary delay previous to my projected offensive, which I shall carry out so soon as my concentration is effected, and I shall have accurate information of the enemy's position which will, I hope, be within a few days." Although the direction of his projected offensive is not specifically stated, it is reasonable to assume from his communications with the Crown Prince of Saxony that he still had in mind an advance to the Iser, and this is the view taken by Duval.<sup>1</sup> Such advance was, however, out of the question, in view of the fact that four Prussian corps were at the moment moving through the mountains against his right flank; and as regards the concentration preliminary to such advance, the area selected for it was dangerously far north, in view of the considerations of time and space which existed when it was first started.

To return to the Prussian Ist Corps at Trautenau, the Prussian leaders were completely taken by surprise, and Bonin soon realized that the position was too formidable to be taken by the advanced guard alone. Six battalions were accordingly called up from the main body which was still about Parschnitz, to make a turning movement against the Austrian right. The commander of the Austrian 10th Corps arrived on the field about 11 o'clock, and ordered the advanced brigade, in view of the increasing strength of the Prussians, to fall back to a new position about half an hour's march to the rear. A further short retirement was then found to be necessary, but by this time the Prussians were exhausted by their severe exertions, carried out in terrible heat, and the fighting died down about 3 P.M.

Till now the Prussian corps commander was quite content with the progress made by his troops, and had, indeed, refused proffered assistance. Soon after 1 o'clock there had appeared at his headquarters an officer of the Guards, with the announcement that the 1st Guard

<sup>1</sup> *Vers Sadowa*, p. 206.

Division was some four and a half miles east of Trautenau ; they had heard the firing and were ready to render assistance if required. Bonin, however, replied that there was no need of this, and consequently the Division of the Guards bore to the left and continued its march to Eipel as ordered. This is the official and usually accepted version of the incident, but the Chief of Staff of the IInd Army in his diary throws a somewhat different complexion upon it.<sup>1</sup>

However this may be, Bonin soon after received message after message from the front to the effect that the enemy was being heavily reinforced. The main body of the Austrian 10th Corps was hastening to the front, the battle was renewed, desperate fighting took place, and about 4 o'clock the day began to go against the Prussians. Retreat set in, and although Bonin apparently intended to halt on the Bohemian side of the pass his troops got out of hand, and continued the retreat until 2 o'clock in the morning, when they arrived thoroughly exhausted at the bivouacs which they had left twenty-four hours earlier. The Austrians did not pursue. Darkness was setting in when the last shots were fired ; the victors were wearied ; information had come in as to the arrival of the Prussian Guards at Eipel ; and finally the needle-gun had taken severe toll of the Austrians. They had lost 196 officers and more than 5500 men.<sup>2</sup> In the 10th Corps every seventh man was wounded or dead, and all the troops were sorely in need of complete rest.

While the unfortunate affair at Trautenau had been taking place, the southern column of the Prussians under General von Steinmetz had been heavily engaged at Nachod ; it was felt that this force might be hard pressed and the expectation was not belied. On June 26 the Vth Corps had reached Reinerz, and had at once pushed forward eight companies and two squadrons through the defile to Nachod, where the weak Austrian posts gave way and fell back. It was the news of this movement which had caused Benedek to divert his 6th Corps from Opocno to Skalitz, with orders to throw forward an advanced guard to Nachod. For-

<sup>1</sup> "The Guards gave no assistance right or left, but remained inactive all day" (*Journal of F. M. Count von Blumenthal, 1866 and 1870*, p. 36).

<sup>2</sup> The Prussian losses were less than one-fourth of this total, *i.e.* 63 officers and 1200 men.

fortunately for the Prussians the advance of the Austrian corps was somewhat delayed, and they made every use of the respite to get clear of the mountains before they could be stopped. But the narrow and deep valley in which Nachod lies was a severe handicap to the Prussians, and the Austrians moving across more open country and by several roads were naturally able to bring up their forces more quickly. The forenoon, therefore, witnessed the endeavour of the Prussians' advanced guard to hold its position against the enemy's superior numbers, until the main body of the Vth Corps should have made its way through the valley and be able to debouch upon the field of battle.

A thin line of Prussians, not more than seven battalions strong, was opposed by practically a whole army corps of the Austrians, and, where the bravery on both sides was equal, it was only the superiority of the needle-gun which saved the invaders from annihilation. Their position was precarious, for in front was a brave enemy greatly superior in numbers, and behind was the valley blocked by a confused mass of men, horses, wagons, and guns. The Austrians suffered frightful losses, but by sheer weight of numbers broke through the Prussian line in many places. At last, about 11 o'clock, the hard-pressed Prussian infantry were reinforced by a cavalry brigade, and a mounted action took place in which the Prussian horse were the unquestioned victors. This charge decided the day; for to escape destruction from the oncoming horsemen the Austrian infantry threw themselves into squares where they formed a particularly vulnerable target for the Prussian needle-gun. By this time the head of the Prussian main body began to debouch and, supported by considerable artillery, assumed the offensive. Led by the fiery Steinmetz, the whole Vth Corps rushed to the attack. Finally, about 4 o'clock, the Austrian corps commander ordered a retreat to Skalitz. No pursuit took place, for the Prussians were spent by their exertions in a burning sun. The day had cost them 300 dead and 800 wounded, a price which was not excessive for the strategic object gained, and small in comparison with the fivefold greater loss suffered by the enemy.

It was not until 1 A.M. on the morning of the 28th that



the Crown Prince had news of the reverse sustained by von Bonin. Even then he did not realize the magnitude of the defeat of the Ist Corps, and was under the impression that Bonin had merely been checked and would renew his efforts to debouch at dawn; but he saw that in any case it was essential to regain the position which had been lost. He dictated at once an order to the Guards to start as early as possible in the morning, to march by the route previously assigned—*i.e.* towards Königinhof—as far as Kaile, and thence to turn northward by the Trautenau road and to fall on the flank and rear of the enemy.

The day was one of considerable anxiety, but great hopes were entertained about the advance of the Guards, while confidence was universally expressed regarding the ability of Steinmetz to push on. Neither the hope nor the confidence were misplaced. Steinmetz won a brilliant victory over the Austrian 8th Corps—which had relieved the 10th—at Skalitz, and on the right things were no less encouraging. The Guard Corps in carrying out its orders met the flank of the Austrian 10th Corps as it was retiring upon Königinhof in column of route. The Austrian rear guard was almost annihilated, and the rest of the corps only escaped at the cost of the loss of most of its baggage and many prisoners. The Guards pursued as far as Soor—from which village the day's action takes its name, and in the evening went into bivouac round Trautenau. Touch was also gained with the unfortunate Ist Corps, whose way through the defile was now assured. Between four and five o'clock it was beyond all doubt that the difficult passage of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army through the mountains was an accomplished fact.

The importance of June 27 has been fully recognized in the Prussian Official History, and, as is almost invariably the case in connection with decisive movements of a campaign, there has been the usual speculation as to how matters would have gone had some of the factors of the day ended differently. Capable critics like the late General Bonnal and Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm are in agreement as to the view that, had the Prussians suffered defeat at Nachod as they had at Trautenau, for some days at all events the Crown Prince's army would have been held fast in the mountains, von

Benedek would have gained the necessary time to complete his concentration, and would have been able to carry out his plan of falling upon Prince Frederick Charles. Where, however, the hypothesis is so great, the discussion necessarily possesses little more than academic interest. The great thing was that Steinmetz was not beaten at Nachod, and conjecture as to what would have happened had he sustained defeat is somewhat beside the point.

Where, however, hypothesis is narrowed down by acceptance of the *faits accomplis* of the fighting of the 27th, and when the student is confronted merely by the question as to what courses were still open to Benedek, the matter takes on a different and more interesting aspect. General Bonnal does not shrink from a sweeping assertion in this case. "The pursuit of the Ist Corps alone on the night of the 27th-28th," he wrote, "could, in spite of the reverse at Nachod, have retarded by some days the arrival of the IIInd Army on the Elbe, and enabled Benedek to move, with all his forces united, to meet Prince Frederick Charles."

This statement, however, demands a careful examination into which the factors of numbers, time, distance, and *moral* must enter closely. To begin with, it is clear that, in spite of General Bonnal's assertion, Benedek could not have moved with *all* his forces united, since, *ex hypothesi*, the Xth Corps would have been engaged in the pursuit of von Bonin's Ist Corps of the Prussians. Thus, at the most, Benedek could have had but five corps, theoretically available in Eastern Bohemia, to unite with the two corps on the Iser under the Crown Prince of Saxony with which to deal with Frederick Charles's five corps. But of the five corps theoretically available in eastern Bohemia, one—the 2nd—was far to the south-east, at least fifty miles from the nearest of Prince Frederick Charles's troops; and, even granting that the latter commander was pressing on towards Gitschin, and thus reducing the distance which the Austrian 2nd Corps would have to traverse, the "some days" mentioned by General Bonnal would require not to be interpreted too narrowly. Again, of the corps really under Benedek's hand, the 6th Corps had been very roughly handled during the day, had suffered nearly 6000 casualties, and was clearly in

no condition to join, with effect, in a lightning stroke of Napoleonic conception and vigour. And further—and this is perhaps the most important point of all—it is obvious that an irreducible minimum of troops would have to be left to put up a vigorous delaying action against Steinmetz and the Guard Corps; and even conceding that the three cavalry divisions down to the south-east could have been brought up in time, at least half a corps of infantry, probably from the 8th Corps, would have been absolutely essential. To sum up, it would appear that, if the “some days” of General Bonnal be construed as meaning not more than four—a generous interpretation in view of the fact that nothing but a lightning stroke would have been of the least use in the circumstances—Benedek could not have transported more than the equivalent of four corps to unite with the troops of Prince Albert in the west. This would make but six Austrian corps, in all, to deal with the five under Prince Frederick Charles, not a very marked numerical superiority with which to bind victory to the Austrian chariot wheels, especially in view of the fact that of the six Austrian corps none had tasted victory and three had actually suffered defeat.

Nor must it be forgotten that in the supposition allowed above, it has been for the moment tacitly conceded that the irreducible minimum left to hold off Steinmetz and the Guard Corps for “some days” would have succeeded in its object. Nothing, however, would have been more improbable. By the evening of the 27th Steinmetz with the Vth Corps was clear of the dangerous defile at Nachod, while the Guards were absolutely fresh and had scarcely fired a shot. The idea that the fiery Steinmetz—the “Lion of Nachod,” as he was afterwards called—would have allowed himself to be played with by a mere delaying fraction of the Austrian forces is curious reading, when the actual fact is borne in mind that on the 28th the whole of the Austrian 8th Corps met with what was practically disaster at the hands of the Prussian commander. And this, too, when Steinmetz was unsupported by the Guards, who were gathering a victory of their own, but who, if the hypothesis that but an irreducible minimum of Austrians had been left in eastern Bohemia, would necessarily have been in a position to co-operate



directly with the Vth Corps. It may be urged that Benedek could have left a force sufficiently strong to put up a really effective resistance against the centre and left of the Prussians emerging from the mountains ; but here the question of robbing Peter to pay Paul makes itself apparent. Had Benedek left such a force in eastern Bohemia he must with inferior numbers have encountered Prince Frederick Charles in the west ; and was it likely that in these circumstances he could have crushed superior forces, armed with the terrible needle-gun, and then have been in a position to hurl his troops eastwards again to crush the II<sup>nd</sup> Army ? The question has but to be put to be answered.

That Benedek had at one time the possibility of exploiting with success the advantage of interior lines is undeniable, and the possibility has been dealt with earlier in this work. But that time had definitely passed away by the evening of the 27th June 1866, and by that date he was in imminent danger of becoming—as he actually did become a few days later—the victim of envelopment. To say, however, that by the evening of June 27 the campaign was wholly lost to Austria would be untrue, for, although Benedek's plan had, chiefly through delay, completely broken down, it was not too late to formulate a new one. He might, for instance, have taken up a position on the left bank of the Elbe, facing west between the fortresses of Josefstadt and Königgrätz, with his right flank protected by the Mettau and the Aupa ; and, as a matter of fact, this was the solution which Moltke thought his adversary would have seized. But this was not all. More than half a century later and in a greater war a commander was to find that the wreck of his initial plan for an offensive had to give way, in a moment, to a strategic retirement, "which, although necessarily yielding territory to the enemy, would permit the generalissimo to reorganize his troops and to resume the offensive at his own time, and strengthened by the addition of a new army from the east." Benedek, however, was not a Joffre, and although the newly formed French 6th Army from the east in 1914 might have had a prototype in a couple of corps railed from the secondary theatre in Italy, the Danube was not fated to witness a decisive battle like the Marne. Whether the solution thus

adumbrated was feasible must ever be a matter of speculation. This much, however, can be said. It would hardly have led to a disaster such as Königgrätz, and it would at any rate have gained time—just the factor which Moltke for political reasons was above all things anxious to avoid.

On June 29 Benedek decided to take up a position with the bulk of his forces on the right bank of the Elbe, facing the Crown Prince. On the next day cavalry detachments sent from the Ist Corps of the Crown Prince's army met similar units exploring east from that of Prince Frederick Charles. Touch between the Ist and IIInd Armies of the Prussians had thus been gained. Moltke now felt that his presence in the field was required for the manipulation of the decisive stroke. Accordingly, on June 30, the King and General Headquarters entrained at Berlin for the front. During the same day Benedek issued orders for a general retreat towards Königgrätz.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—BEFORE KÖNIGGRÄTZ

THE King had as yet heard nothing of the triumph of his nephew at Gitschin, but no fears were entertained as to that quarter, and accordingly, during the journey south, orders were telegraphed to the leaders of both armies to the following effect. The II<sup>nd</sup> Army was to maintain its position on the left bank of the Upper Elbe, with its right wing ready to join the left of the I<sup>st</sup> Army by way of Königinhof. The I<sup>st</sup> Army, on its part, was to advance without stopping in the direction of Königgrätz; while General Herwath was to attack any hostile troops that might appear on the right flank of this advance, and separate them from the enemy's main army. By midnight General Headquarters had reached Reichenberg and were installed in the country house of the unfortunate Clam Gallas, and shortly afterwards Moltke received a belated telegram from Prince Frederick Charles with the news of the capture of Gitschin.

So far all was well. But the morning of July 1 brought disconcerting news. The whole Austrian army had disappeared. During the night Benedek had withdrawn all his troops, and the Prussians received no news of this retreat, still less of its direction and destination. During the whole of July 1, therefore, they remained in ignorance of the situation and movements of the Austrians and contented themselves with closing on the centre. Moltke was in the curious position of knowing less about the enemy, now he had journeyed to the front, than he did while he was conducting the campaign from his desk at Berlin. It was, however, no time for repining over the amazing remissness of the Prussian cavalry. Moltke had come to stage-manage



the final act, and the situation had to be grappled with at once.

With the coolness which invariably characterized his plans, Moltke quickly made up his mind that now that his two wings were in touch and that the enemy could not be found, the essential point was to prevent them closing in so much as to lose their manœuvre intervals. The time was none too soon, for both the Crown Prince and Frederick Charles were beginning to close the space, and it required a definite order to stop them. Orders were accordingly sent to the 1st and II<sup>nd</sup> Armies to stand fast upon the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and although the Army of the Elbe was ordered to move it was merely to ensure that it should edge away to the south so as likewise to gain its interval of manœuvre.

"This arrangement," wrote Moltke later in the Official Account, "strategically safe, was also tactically very advantageous. If the army were united in one mass, and the enemy were then to be met with in a position whence he could not be dislodged by a frontal attack, it would be necessary again to be divided in order to make a flank attack. On the other hand, in keeping the two armies a short march apart no risk was run if the enemy should attack, for then the other would take him in flank."

This is quite true and its truth is easily comprehended now. Nevertheless, the simplicity with which Moltke states it must not be allowed to rob him of the credit of a decision which demanded clearness of perception and unwavering firmness of purpose. The union of his two wings was what Moltke had played for, and for which he had run no inconsiderable risk. His refusal to allow himself to yield to any apprehension of being beaten in detail, and his decision to arrest the converging march of his armies at the critical moment, stamps him as a great commander.

During the morning of July 2 Prussian General Headquarters moved to Gitschin, and the King of Prussia assumed supreme command of the troops. With him were Bismarck, Moltke, and Roon. Prince Frederick Charles, whose headquarters were at Kamenitz, had also come to Gitschin, and was present at a conference held during the day. Moltke had, by the time the conference assembled, formed his plan of operations for dealing the decisive blow to the army of

his opponent. At the time the information regarding the Austrians was still negative; that is to say, no more was known about their position than that they had disappeared without a trace. The first thing to do was that Moltke should put himself in Benedek's place and decide what, under the circumstances, would be the wisest course to pursue. In Moltke's opinion, after suffering a series of reverses a wise leader would withdraw to the most convenient strong defensive position where he could gain time to reorganize his forces and obtain reinforcements. Such a position seemed available on the left bank of the Elbe, between Josefstadt and Königgrätz, for there the Elbe would cover the Austrian front, a fortress would be on each flank, and, further, the more exposed flank—the right—would gain additional protection from the Aupa and the Mettau. On the assumption that this was the position actually occupied, Moltke made his plans either to attack the Austrians in their position or to manoeuvre them out of it. The first essential was a reconnaissance of the position. The Crown Prince was, therefore, ordered to explore the vicinity of Josefstadt, and ascertain the strength of the supposed position of the enemy; if this proved such as might be attacked he was then to transport all his troops again to the left bank, and marching down the stream seize the enemy in flank while Prince Frederick Charles was to press the enemy in front from the right bank. If, on the other hand, such an attack seemed impracticable, then all the Prussian armies were to try to press round the enemy by a march towards the south, cross the Elbe at Pardubitz, and thus threaten his communications with the south.

The mission imposed upon the Crown Prince was a difficult one and, in the mind of his Chief of Staff, impossible.<sup>1</sup> Jumping into his carriage, he drove off in hot haste the twenty odd miles to Gitschin, and burst in with expostulations upon Moltke and the King. Blumenthal deprecated what he considered an unwise reconnaissance in force, and

<sup>1</sup> Count von Blumenthal. In his *Journal* he wrote, "On the 2nd we received orders for an extraordinary disposition of the troops according to which both armies were to reconnoitre in force on both banks of the Elbe. That was a little too strong, and I felt sure that they did not quite know what they were doing at headquarters."

laid a characteristic plan before his sovereign. "Your Majesty should just lay your ruler on the map between Gitschin and Vienna, draw your pencil along the ruler, and march straight along that line." The scheme was received with a polite amusement by the King, and with an amusement not so polite by the other participants at the conference—Moltke amongst them. A pungent paragraph in Blumenthal's diary bears interesting testimony to his chagrin.<sup>1</sup>

Blumenthal's plan was the irresponsible suggestion of a tired and irritated subordinate, and needs no detailed criticism. The two methods which Moltke had thought out for dealing with Benedek are, however, in a different case and deserve a fuller consideration. Both his plans are adversely commented upon by General Bonnal, the first on the ground that the flank attack was not sufficiently strong, and should have been strengthened by the transfer of at least one corps from the Ist to the II<sup>nd</sup> Army—in other words the maximum strength should have been placed opposite the Austrian right on the Aupa and Mettau, and the minimum opposite the front on the Elbe. In his reluctance to draw from the frontal attack to reinforce the decisive attack upon the flank, General Bonnal considered that Moltke showed himself far inferior to Napoleon. As regards Moltke's second plan, which was to be put into force should the difficulties encountered in the attack on the Austrian right be very formidable, it comes in for severe comment from the French critic. General Bonnal indeed described the idea of bringing the three Prussian armies by a flank march across the enemy's position as "an astounding project," and it must be confessed that in the more academic atmosphere of a war game or staff tour such a solution would be greeted with amazement. General Bonnal severely criticizes the inadequate arrangements made by Moltke to pin the Austrians to their ground, while the flank march should be

<sup>1</sup> "Headquarters was to me not an impressive experience. A crowd of long-faced loafers is always an odious sight, especially when they greet one in a sort of condescending manner, fancying themselves omniscient, and apportioning blame freely, in some cases neither knowing nor understanding the circumstances" (*Journal of Count Blumenthal*, Eng. Trans. p. 39).



in progress, and even goes so far as to say that had the movement ever been put into practice, it would have ended in disaster for the Prussians. On the other hand, it must be admitted that had it succeeded it would certainly have lived in history as a classic manœuvre. But it was not destined to be put to the test. The supposition on which it was based, namely that Benedek was behind the Elbe, was found to be false. Fresh deliberations were necessary.

Benedek was not behind the Elbe; he was on Moltke's side of it, and, indeed, his outposts were but a few miles from those of the Prussians. But so badly was the service of information carried out on both sides that for hours neither side had suspected the nearness of the other. Reports, however, had come in to the headquarters of the Ist Army during the day, which showed that strong bodies of the enemy were about Lipa, and at last the Prussian cavalry performed useful service of exploration. Officers' patrols pushed out and returned in the evening with the news that the ground between the Bistritz and the Elbe was swarming with Austrian troops. The information was laid before Prince Frederick Charles immediately on his return from the conference at Gitschin, and it seemed to him that Benedek was about to take the offensive. With a resolution in welcome contrast to his earlier slowness, he determined, on his own initiative, to forestall his opponent. At 9 o'clock he issued orders for all his divisions to be formed up on the Horitz—Königgrätz road at daybreak, ready for an attack against Sadowa, while the Army of the Elbe was to move as soon as possible to Nechanitz. In a word, Prince Frederick Charles intended to deliver a frontal attack with his own six divisions, while the Army of the Elbe was to fall upon the Austrian left flank. At the same time he sent a letter to the Crown Prince, informing him of his intention and begging him to advance to his support with the Guards, or a stronger force if possible, on the right bank of the Elbe.

The officer who carried Prince Frederick Charles's letter to the Crown Prince left Kamenitz about 10 P.M., and arrived at the headquarters of the latter shortly before daybreak. The fact that a vitally important message, which contained

within it the germ which was to grow into the decisive battle of the campaign, should have been sent by a mounted messenger was due to the breakdown of the telegraphic service. Moltke had counted upon the electric telegraph to keep the armies in communication with General Headquarters and with each other, but now, at the supreme moment of the struggle, primitive methods of transmitting information had to be resorted to, and that the Army Staff and General Headquarters were unable to communicate with each other save by means of mounted officers was a serious drawback. During the night of July 2-3, on the road to the II<sup>nd</sup> Army, there was actually a procession of four officers pounding after each other and arriving between 2 and 5 A.M. with three different sets of instructions for the Crown Prince.<sup>1</sup> The distance from General Headquarters at Gitschin to the headquarters of the Crown Prince at Königinhof was over twenty miles, and the absence of a rapid means of communication between the two was, as will be seen, a serious handicap to the Chief of the Staff. It is necessary to dwell upon this point, as there is a tendency sometimes to visualize Moltke as a battle-maker directing the contest from afar by the sure communication afforded by the new science of telegraphy. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. On the night of July 2-3 Moltke had to deal with a new and unexpected situation shorn of the system of communication to which he had pinned his faith, and the coolness and decision with which he acted in spite of the breakdown stand largely to his credit.

It was nearly midnight before the new and unexpected situation was revealed to Moltke. At half-past ten the various staff-officers of General Headquarters at Gitschin had dispersed and the King of Prussia was retiring for the night, when a staff-officer of the army of Prince Frederick Charles was announced. It was General Voigt-Rhetz with news of import for his sovereign. He came to announce the result of the reconnaissances which had been made during the day, and to ask for the sanction and approval of the King, as Commander-in-chief, for the Prince's plan of action for the morrow. At first, King William could scarcely

<sup>1</sup> See footnote, p. 151.

credit the report that Benedek had drawn up his whole army upon the banks of the Bistritz, but he saw at once that with the Elbe in their rear, the position of the Austrians in case of a reverse would be extremely serious for them. He accordingly directed Voigt-Rhetz to make his way across the market square to the billet of von Moltke, and to explain the situation fully and at once to the Chief of the Staff. "If," he said, "General Moltke is of opinion that any new steps ought to be taken, you can apply to me to-night for the necessary orders. You will find me ready at any hour."

It was now 11 o'clock, and Moltke was asleep, but the important news brooked no delay. From the detailed explanation given by Voigt-Rhetz, it was clear that the reports brought in by the patrols from the Ist Army could be implicitly relied upon, and Moltke accepted the view that Benedek had at last hardened his heart and was about to advance to the attack. But he saw at once that the plan of Prince Frederick Charles was not the plan from which the decisive result could, in the newly revealed situation, be achieved. Although Voigt-Rhetz pointed out that the Prince had asked his cousin to observe Josefstadt, and to protect the left of the Ist Army, Moltke realized that Prince Frederick Charles was not sufficiently strong to attack the whole Austrian army should it be found concentrated and in position, still less so should he be anticipated by an offensive launched at last by the Austrian Commander-in-chief. And as regards the co-operation between the Ist and IIInd Armies arranged for by Prince Frederick Charles, that commander could only request assistance; he could not order it, and the assistance might, therefore, be wanting at the critical moment.<sup>1</sup> Clearly then, if victory were to be achieved, every man must be thrown into the struggle; the battle must be co-ordinated from General Headquarters; and the IIInd Army must be employed offensively and *au fond* against the enemy's right flank.

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact when the letter from Prince Frederick Charles reached IIInd Army Headquarters the Crown Prince had retired for the night, and the Chief of Staff of the army was temporarily absent. The letter remained unopened until the arrival of the latter, and the assistance requested was refused.



There were, however, several factors which could not be lightly set aside. The Crown Prince's headquarters were twenty miles away. It was now near midnight ; telegraphic communication was severed, and instructions sent by a mounted officer could hardly reach the II<sup>nd</sup> Army before 4 A.M. Then the state of the ground, owing to the rains, made marching difficult, and some of the troops would have to march five or six hours to reach the Austrian right flank. It was doubtful, therefore, if the whole of the Crown Prince's army could be brought up in time to take part in the fight. And if it did not arrive in time, and if Benedek's eight corps were found behind the Bistritz, the Prussians under Prince Frederick Charles would be hard put to it to make a stand. Everything depended, therefore, upon whether Benedek had the whole or only part of his army in position between the Bistritz and the Elbe, and whether the Crown Prince could come up in time or not.

By postponing the attack for a day the arrival of the Crown Prince's army could be assured, and a further day's reconnaissance would probably, to some extent, lift the veil from Benedek's position. On the other hand, postponement would remove the element of surprise, a factor worth exploiting to the full in view of the reverses which the Austrians had suffered, with almost certain damage to their *moral*. The delay of a day would, further, make Benedek all the stronger if, as was not unlikely, his concentration was still incomplete ; whereas if it should happen to be complete, the sooner the Prussians closed inwards the better. It is true that Moltke had halted the converging wings with the view of securing room for manœuvre ; but this step had been taken with the view of not fettering his course of action until the situation should have clarified. Now that it was possible that the Austrians might be concentrated and about to attack the necessary clarification had been secured, and the fact that the Prussian armies were separated became a positive disadvantage to them. Upon this subject Moltke subsequently wrote :

On the morning of July 3 our front was extended over sixteen miles, a position in which we dared not allow ourselves to be attacked. By assuming the offensive, however, we could con-

concentrate all the corps upon the battle-field, thus changing the strategical disadvantage of our extension into the tactical advantage of a complete envelopment of the enemy.

Again there was the fact to consider that the troops of Prince Frederick Charles were already in motion, and a counterorder was to be deprecated. Finally, there was the political factor, which was instant and imperative. In the interests not only of her military but also of her foreign relations, an immediate decision on the part of Prussia was vital. France was eager to act as an interested mediator, and on the previous day the King had learned of the impending arrival of the French Ambassador on an important mission from Napoleon III. In these circumstances, the sooner a telling victory was scored up the better would the Prussian situation be; especially as there was the possibility that Benedek's heart might fail him at the eleventh hour, and that he might give the Prussians the slip once again.

True to his motto, *Erst wägen, dann wagen*, Moltke came to the conclusion that the risk of the uncertainty of the arrival of the Crown Prince should be run, and as Chief of the Staff he felt that his clear duty was so to advise the King. He went at once to the King's billet, which was on the market-place opposite, was immediately admitted and found the King quite alone, and lying on his camp-bed. It needed but a few words to describe the favourable nature of the situation, provided that full advantage were taken of it. King William required no long exposition. He saw Moltke's point and immediately decided to attack the enemy early in the morning of July 3 from all sides. The arrangements already made by Prince Frederick Charles perfectly corresponded with this plan, and the only thing was to secure the co-operation of the Crown Prince who now stood on the enemy's flank, but almost a day's march from it. The necessary orders were therefore immediately drafted, and by midnight were sent off in duplicate by two separate routes to Königinhof, and Prince Frederick Charles was apprised by the returning General von Voigt-Rhetz of the resolution taken.

The full text of the order to the II<sup>nd</sup> Army was as follows :

GITSCHIN, July 2, 11 P.M.

According to reports received by the Ist Army the enemy, strength about three corps, which may, however, be still further reinforced, has advanced to and beyond the line formed by the Bistritz at Sadowa, and an encounter there with the Ist Army is to be expected very early to-morrow morning. The Ist Army, according to orders, will be to-morrow morning at 2 A.M. with two divisions at Horitz, one at Milowitz, one at Cerekwitz, two at Pschansk and Bristau, and the Cavalry Corps at Gutwasser.

Your Royal Highness will be good enough immediately to make the necessary arrangements to be able to advance with all your forces in support of the Ist Army against the right flank of the enemy's probable advance, and in so doing to come into action as soon as possible. The orders issued from here this afternoon in other conditions are now no longer valid.

This order was carried in duplicate by two officers, one taking the route *via* Miletin, the other by Kamenitz. The former was also charged with a special order to the commander of the Ist Corps (von Bonin) directing him to collect his troops in anticipation of the order he would later receive from the Crown Prince.<sup>1</sup>

The authors of the Prussian Official Account as well as

<sup>1</sup> During the early hours of the fateful July 3 there were thus four officers *en route* for IInd Army Headquarters, bearing three different sets of instructions. There was first of all (a) the officer who carried Prince Frederick Charles's letter to the Crown Prince with the former's plan of action for July 3 (see p. 146). This messenger left Kamenitz about 10 P.M. and arrived at the headquarters of the IInd Army in Königinhof at 2 A.M. Following him in a carriage was (b) Blumenthal, the Chief of Staff of the IInd Army, who arrived back from Gitschin about 3 A.M. (see p. 145); until his arrival at his headquarters, where he was shown the message from Prince Frederick Charles, Blumenthal was working upon Moltke's orders of July 2 (see p. 144), modified possibly to a slight extent as the result of his visit to Gitschin. Then at 4 A.M. arrived (c) Count Finckenstein from Gitschin with Moltke's fresh orders drawn up at the midnight conference. Some time later there arrived (d) the duplicate set carried by the second orderly officer. Curiously enough when message (a) arrived the Crown Prince was not awakened, and it was kept unopened until Blumenthal arrived (b); even then the Crown Prince was still allowed to sleep on, and Blumenthal took it upon himself to refuse troops to protect Prince Frederick Charles's left. It should be noted that there is a discrepancy in the best authorities as to the relative arrivals of (a) and (b). See *Sadowa* by General Bonnal (English translation), pp. 131 and 132 (followed by Lieut.-Colonel Malcolm, *Bohemia*, 1866, p. 96); and *Journals of Count Blumenthal, 1866 and 1870-71* (English translation), p. 39.



the historian von Sybel give the King of Prussia the credit for the midnight decision of July 2-3, but it is now agreed that it is to Moltke that the honour is due—and indeed Moltke's own later writings leave no doubt whatever upon the point. His decision has been since rightly and almost universally praised, and not least by the French critic, General Bonnal, who emphasizes the fact that Moltke's greatness is clearly shown in his order to the II<sup>nd</sup> Army to assist the I<sup>st</sup> with all its forces. "The decision," writes General Bonnal, "was simple enough, but it proved that its author possessed an exalted conception of the war of masses, and it was destined to save the I<sup>st</sup> Army from decisive defeat, and to change into a brilliant victory a situation which would have meant irredeemable disaster if Moltke had agreed to the plan of Prince Frederick Charles." The phrase "irredeemable disaster" will possibly be demurred to by many, for the greater efficiency of the Prussians, their much higher *moral*, and the tactical advantage they possessed in the needle-gun, would almost certainly have prevented a reverse developing into a disaster. Nevertheless, it was to the daring of Moltke, at a critical moment, that the avoidance of a smart set-back at least was entirely due.

His decision was one which would have redounded to the credit of a commander seasoned in warfare, and at the full tide of physical vigour. But it merits even higher praise when it is remembered that it was the decision made by a man nearing his seventieth year, who had done practically no field service for forty years, who had never commanded a brigade or battalion or even a company in action, and who had only just arrived in the theatre of war. Here was no "library rat" poring over maps in a distant War Office, and directing a campaign with detached precision, but a Chief of the Staff in the field at a hurried midnight council, gripping the situation in an instant, weighing the advantages and drawbacks of each course of action, and fearlessly shouldering the responsibility of staking everything on a throw. And high is the praise due to Moltke for not marring the greatness of his decision as a commander of inferior calibre almost certainly would have done by a mass of detailed instructions. When he sent off his despatch to the Crown Prince he was

ignorant as to whether it was three or more corps which Benedek had concentrated. Neither could he tell if the Austrians would commence the fight, nor if the scene of action would be east or west of the Bistritz. Wisely, therefore, he refrained from fettering the Crown Prince by naming any geographical objective. He says simply the "enemy's right flank." Similarly, he showed his greatness in not interfering with the orders already issued to the Ist Army and the Army of the Elbe. He knew that for some hours these nine divisions might have to support the attack of the whole Austrian army, and it was still possible to hold them back until the arrival of the Crown Prince was assured. The confidence which he felt that the Crown Prince would march at the earliest moment and shape his route by the sound of the guns was equalled by the faith he reposed in Prince Frederick Charles to hold out until the help should come.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE WAR OF 1866 (*continued*)—THE BATTLE OF KÖNIGGRÄTZ AND THE END OF THE WAR

LIKE a prudent commander von Moltke had taken into consideration the most unfavourable hypothesis, namely, that Benedek was not only concentrated but about to attack. As a matter of fact the task was simpler than he had dared to hope, for Benedek's only idea was to await attack, thus allowing himself to be gripped in the vice which was closing upon him. During the afternoon of June 30, the reverses which the Austrians had experienced east and west led the Commander-in-chief to issue orders for a general retreat in the direction of Königgrätz, the Emperor being advised by the alarming telegram sent off at 5.30 P.M. :

Débâcle of the Ist and Saxon Corps forces me to retreat in the direction of Königgrätz. Headquarters to-morrow in that neighbourhood.

An hour earlier Benedek had opened his heart in a pathetic letter to his wife.

" This is," he wrote, " possibly the last time I shall ever write to you. I told the Emperor that whenever he ordered me to, I would sacrifice my honour as a soldier and a citizen for him. How and why has the army, whose units have shown the most decided courage, fallen into this desperate situation? Within a few hours a great battle will be joined. I may never see you again. Better that I should meet a bullet; but if so I shall meet it gladly, if at such a price I can render a last service to my Emperor and to the army. . . ."

The words lay bare the loyal soul of the unfortunate Austrian commander. But they are in curious contrast to the firm-



ness and resolution displayed by his contemporary and opponent.

Shortly after midnight of June 30–July 1 the movement began in four columns, and by the forenoon of the 3rd the Austrians were within a huge oblong lying between the Elbe and the Bistritz. Benedek was still a prey to dismal forebodings, for at 11.30 A.M. he telegraphed to the Emperor. "I entreat your Majesty to make peace at any price. Disaster is inevitable." Gradually in the absence of any sign of the enemy his confidence returned and orders were issued for the troops to hold their ground upon the morrow. Benedek's army, about 210,000 strong, including some 24,000 cavalry and 770 guns, and comprising eight corps, now stood at bay. The left was guarded by the 8th Corps, and the Saxons with detachments thrown forward to the course of the Bistritz at Nechanitz and Lubno. In the centre were the 3rd and 10th Corps with outposts as far as the Bistritz, and the main masses holding Lipa and the high ground at Chulm, and the whole guarding the main road through Sadowa to Königgrätz, from both of which places the battle takes its name. The right was formed by the 4th and 2nd Corps, and in rear were the 1st and 6th and the great mass of the cavalry. The position was naturally strong had it been turned to the fullest advantage. The field of fire was generally good, the flanks were protected by the Trotina and Bistritz, and the lie of the ground enabled the Austrian reserve troops to move in security. Benedek, however, made the fatal mistake of neglecting to secure his right adequately against the Crown Prince's army, while the cavalry, instead of covering the wings, was collected in rear and rendered almost useless.

The day which was to decide the long rivalry between Austria and Prussia was ushered in by a wild and rainy dawn. At 4 o'clock, Moltke, accompanied by two officers of his staff, drove off to Horitz, where they mounted their chargers and rode forward through Milowitz. At about 8 A.M. a burst of cheering announced the arrival of the King of Prussia on the battle-field, and a few moments later the chiefs of the Prussian army moved forward to the Hill of Dub, facing Sadowa, where Prince Frederick Charles

reported and gave a full account of the situation. Several notables, among them Bismarck, joined the party, and the suite formed a group so conspicuous that an Austrian battery promptly sent a few shells across.

The battle was now definitely joined, for about 7.30 A.M. the first shots had been fired. The duty of the Ist Army was to pin the enemy to his ground in order that the double flank attack, which had been concerted, might have full play, and in practice it resulted that Prince Frederick Charles decided to drive in the Austrian outposts, and consolidate himself on the right, or west, bank of the Bistritz. The Army of the Elbe did not expect to reach Nechanitz until between 7 A.M. and 9 A.M., so Prince Frederick Charles prepared merely to engage the enemy on the line of the Bistritz for the moment with his artillery. Circumstances had, however, arisen which compelled him to take vigorous action somewhat earlier than he had intended. His left division—the 7th—had been ordered to take post at Cerekwitz, and to advance thence “so soon as the action at Sadowa commenced.” The artillery fire, which began about half-past seven, was taken by the commander of the 7th Division as the signal for advance, with the result that, by the time the headquarters staff had arrived at their position on the Hill of Dub, the 7th Division had thrust itself into an isolated position on the left bank of the Bistritz, and had drawn upon itself the greater part of two Austrian corps.

In order to relieve the pressure on the 7th Division, and indeed to save it from destruction, King William ordered that the Ist Army should cross the Bistritz and deliver an attack all along the line. The passage of the river was carried out by the 8th, 4th, and 3rd Divisions successfully, the two latter being compelled to leave their artillery behind, for the moment, on the right bank. So far the Ist Army, in the centre, had received no help from the armies on the flanks. The Crown Prince was still far from the battle-field, and the Army of the Elbe had as yet hardly made itself felt against the Austrian left. By 11 o'clock the position of the Ist Army had become very serious, and the attempt to relieve the pressure on the 7th Division had resulted merely in exposing the 8th, 4th, and 3rd Divisions to

a terrific artillery fire, to which they were quite unable to reply. The 5th and 6th Divisions, which had till now been in reserve, were brought across the Bistritz about mid-day, but in spite of a slight increase in the number of Prussian batteries, the infantry suffered severe losses, and every moment the situation became graver. As for the 7th Division, its situation by 11 o'clock had become desperate. Its centre had just broken under the pressure of the ever-increasing forces of the enemy, and its wings, gradually becoming isolated, were on the verge of being surrounded.

On the Hill of Dub the gravity of the situation was clear to the spectators of the fight, and many and anxious were the looks directed towards the north-east for some sign which would announce the anxiously awaited appearance of the Crown Prince's army. Bismarck, especially, was a prey to a regular paroxysm of nervous tension. Reflecting bitterly how for four years he had toiled to bring about the international situation which would render victory possible, he groaned at the thought that now, "these infernal generals are going to make a mess of it." His confidence was, however, to a great extent restored by an incident, trivial in itself, but revealing the imperturbability of the Chief of the Staff. To soothe his nerves Bismarck smoked incessantly, and on one occasion hastily thrust his case into Moltke's hand. The coolness with which the latter selected the cigar of his choice showed clearly that the day was not yet lost. The King, however, was infected with the general uneasiness and addressed an earnest question to his adviser upon the condition of affairs. Moltke's reply was characteristic: "Your Majesty will win to-day not only a battle but a campaign."

Beyond the wooded Swiep Wald, where the 7th Division was so seriously engaged, there stood out sharply marked against the horizon a hill crowned by two lofty trees. It was the hill of Horenowes, towards which the Headquarters Staff had long and anxiously been gazing. Now, shortly after 11 o'clock, there rose from it the white smoke of a battery in action. The guns could not be other than Austrian pieces. And as the hill was not being attacked by



the Prussian Ist Army, the fire could be directed only against the IIInd, and it seemed clear that the long awaited flank attack was about to make itself felt. In the opposite direction, too, the smoke revealed the progress of the advance of the Army of the Elbe from Nechanitz against the enemy's left wing.

Thus the morning wore away, and the afternoon was two hours spent before the danger of a Prussian defeat had been removed. Matters looked gravest between 1 and 2 o'clock, but about the latter hour flashes were seen from the guns in action on the hill of Horenowes, showing that they were firing in the direction of the watchers, and must, therefore, no longer be Austrian artillery, but guns from the Prussian IIInd Army in action against the Austrian 4th Corps. The arrival of the Prussian infantry seems to have been first detected by Bismarck, who suddenly lowered his glass and called the attention of his companions to certain lines in the far distance. The weather was still misty, and the telescopes which were brought to bear in the direction indicated were powerless to define the objects. The general opinion was that the lines were merely furrows. Bismarck, however, after another scrutiny declared that the spaces between them were not equal, and that they were lines of men advancing. All doubt was soon set at rest by the arrival of an officer with news of the approach, after a forced march, of the foremost portion of the Army of the Crown Prince.

By 3 o'clock a perceptible slackening of the Austrian fire afforded a significant indication of the change which had come over the battle. The crisis was over, and a Prussian victory was now assured. The IIInd Army was now in possession of Chlum, Rosberitz, and Nedelist, and almost across the Austrian main line of retreat through Königgrätz. The Army of the Elbe was pressing hard against the Austrian left, and, but for a long delay caused by crossing the single bridge at Nechanitz, might even now have broken through the defence upon that flank.

The Austrians counter-attacked with vigour to secure their line of retreat, but it was clear that the day was going in favour of the Prussians, and at 3.30 P.M. the King gave the word for the whole line to advance. An hour later, in spite

of the devotion of the Austrian gunners, the whole Austrian army, right, left, and centre, was in full retreat, and by 6 o'clock the wings of the victorious army had closed in upon the centre, and units from the II<sup>nd</sup> Army and the Army of the Elbe met on the main road which traverses the battle-field not far from Königgrätz.

The pursuit, from which much might possibly have been achieved, was slow. The Prussians were tired; the confusion—inevitable after twelve hours' marching and fighting—was considerable; the great extent of the battle-field made a complete and rapid survey of the situation a difficult matter; and the Prussian cavalry, which had been held back all through the campaign, was dispersed just at the moment when it ought to have been in hand to deliver a crushing blow. Accordingly, at half-past six, Moltke drafted a brief order at the farm of Bor, directing that the morrow should be a day of rest, and that only the Army of the Elbe should continue the pursuit towards Pardubitz. Thus the battle, which in many respects had borne a striking resemblance to Waterloo, fell far short of its prototype in the concluding phase.

However brilliant in its strategic and tactical powers, the Headquarters Staff of the Prussian army had much to learn of the minutiae of campaigning. In the haste and impatience of starting in the morning no one had thought of providing himself with even a haversack ration for the day. Even the King had to pass the day without food. Worse still, no provision had been made to form an advanced General Headquarters, and although the King found a shelter at Horitz, the Chief of the Staff had to drive back 25 miles to Gitschin. Moltke was forced to beg a slice of sausage from a passing Uhlan, and this was all he had to eat since the night before. Gitschin was not reached until nearly midnight. There no food could be got, though with some trouble a cup of tea was produced. Feverish with exhaustion, Moltke threw himself on his camp-bed to snatch a few hours' rest. Barely twenty-four hours previously he had, in the self-same room, staked everything on a single throw. The daring of his plan had been completely justified, and he lay down to rest, wearied and exhausted, but the victor in the greatest battle that had been fought since Leipzig.

Prussia had paid dearly for her victory, for her losses amounted to 359 officers and nearly 9000 other ranks, but these figures were insignificant when set side by side with those of her opponent. The Austrians had 5600 killed, 7600 wounded, and had lost as prisoners nearly 20,000, of whom more than half were unwounded. The casualties of the Saxons exceeded 1500, and the Austrians lost 160 guns and 5 colours.

So completely did Austria realize the magnitude of the disaster of Königgrätz that an emissary was sent next day to Prussian Headquarters to seek for a suspension of hostilities as a preliminary to peace. To this Prussia was, however, unable to accede until her ally Italy had been consulted, and the pursuit of the shattered Austrian troops was begun, though in a somewhat cautious manner. Strategy in its fullest sense would have required that the defeated and demoralized enemy should have been followed up with relentless promptitude, and that no opportunity should be granted him for any possible recovery, but after Königgrätz the subordination of strategy to politics was clearly marked. From the military point of view there was a drag upon the operations. Bismarck's inmost thought after the victory was revealed in his remark, "The struggle is decided—the task is now to win back the old friendship with Austria," and a week later he wrote to his wife, "Things go well; if we do not exaggerate our demands, and if we do not believe that we have conquered the world, we shall get a peace worth the efforts we have made. But we are as easily intoxicated as we are depressed, and I have the thankless task of pouring water into the foaming wine, and bringing home the truth that we do not live alone in Europe, but with three neighbours."

Thus the Prussian strategy had perforce to stop short at the annihilation of the Austrian army, and only one army was sent to follow the retreating enemy towards Olmütz, while the other two were set in motion towards Vienna. The Austrian government made one despairing effort to save the capital, towards which two corps were summoned from Italy, and the whole of the Austrian troops were placed under the Archduke Albrecht, the victor of Custoza. That



commander decided to concentrate all his forces on the Danube, but although he succeeded so far as to frustrate an attempt of the Prussians to interpose between his forces, the campaign died away, and the preliminaries of peace were signed at Nicolsburg on July 26.

The proposals of Napoleon III. formed the basis of these preliminaries of peace, the essentials on which he laid stress being that the new Federation under Prussian leadership should be confined north of the Main, and that the independence of the Southern States should be formally recognized. The hegemony of Prussia in Germany would by such a treaty fall far short of what had at one time been hoped for and it was a momentous question whether such peace terms should be signed at all. Moltke's views upon the subject show clearly that the natural instinct of a soldier for a decisive military victory was kept in check by his statesmanlike power of outlook :

" Was the war," he wrote later, " to be carried on in the hope of yet greater results ? Our army stood before Vienna, and Preszburg was all but in our grasp. The outcome of a second battle gave us but small concern, and an entry into Vienna might have been made without serious loss. With so much in our favour from a military point of view, it was only natural that we should wish to follow up our triumph to its farthest limit, and give full scope to the energies of our forces. A goal which the First Napoleon had never omitted to reach, the enemy's capital, lay temptingly at hand with its spires already in sight. On the other hand it must be remembered that Austria, even after the loss of Vienna, would not be compelled to make peace. She could make her way into Hungary, and there await further European complications. Again, if no peace arrangements on the Napoleonic basis were come to, the interests no less than the honour of France would suffer. Our great end had not been reached, and for a yet greater one were fresh sacrifices, fresh efforts to be asked of the Prussian nation, jeopardizing anew the results already gained ? A wise policy measures its aims by its needs rather than by its wishes. By this contemplated peace the national development of Germany, under the guidance of Prussia, was now secured, and further schemes of conquest formed no part of the plan of her Government. Both King and people could say that they had discharged to the full the duties laid upon them by the State ; and they were bound to acknowledge that to the security and development of the national

existence of both Prussia and Germany there was absolutely nothing wanting. What Prussia now expected to gain in territory and power might subsequently be hers by a later peaceful development. The conditions offered by Austria did not preclude the possibility of a future reconciliation between herself and her former confederates. Her honour and might had not suffered to such an extent as to make such enmity irreconcilable. To demand more, even if a successful continuation of hostilities admitted of it, would leave a thorn behind which time would not be able to remove; to perpetuate such a rupture would hardly be in the interest of either Germany or Prussia."

The King who, with his political and military advisers, had discussed the *pros* and *cons* of the whole question, decided in favour of peace. On July 26 Bismarck signed the peace preliminaries, and Moltke the military convention dealing with the demarcation of the fronts of the opposing armies.

Moltke's task was, however, not yet done. Although politics had exercised a restraining influence after Königgrätz, there were other considerations of a grave nature outside the Prusso-Austrian contest, and it was not impossible that the war might spread over Europe. There were difficulties with France as regards "compensation," which Napoleon III. more than hinted at, and a new complication was developing in Italian affairs. Prussia had secured only Venetia and not the Italian Tyrol for her ally. That province was at the moment occupied by Italian troops, and Austria showed clearly that she would renew the struggle unless the Italians should evacuate Austrian territory by August 11. What Bismarck had so long, and hitherto so successfully, tried to avoid—a war with France and Austria at the same time—seemed now to be an imminent danger. If Italy refused to evacuate the Tyrol, and if France persisted in her claim for the Rhineland, Prussia might find that her striking success in Bohemia had involved her in a very serious situation indeed.

At this critical moment Moltke was the one obviously to be consulted. On August 8 he submitted an appreciation of the situation, in which he stated that it was clearly important to conclude peace with Austria as quickly as possible,

in order to have both hands free towards the east and the west, the last six words being an allusion to a possible Franco-Russian alliance. Moltke laid down that the co-operation of the South Germans might reasonably be looked for, and he estimated that within eight or ten days their contingents, about 84,000 strong, might be concentrated round Mannheim, while in the same period 90,000 men of the Prussian army of the Main, strengthened by the II<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Corps, might be brought to Mainz. This strategic deployment could not, under any circumstances, be matched by France as regards speed, and Moltke had no hesitation in asserting that the French chances of success, were she to attack Germany unaided, would be very small.

In the other hypothetical case of an alliance between France and Austria, Moltke showed that half of the Austrian army would, in that event, be once more locked up in Italy. Nevertheless, and in spite of the damage in moral and manpower which Austria had suffered, the forces which she could still put into the field would, in view of her alliance with France, be sufficient to restrict Prussia to the defensive in the region of Prag. To oppose France, more than 200,000 North Germans and 80,000 South Germans could be assembled by the beginning of September, between the Main and the Neckar; but France on her part could, within twenty-six days, concentrate an army of operations of 250,000 men between Metz and Strasburg—it being taken for granted by Moltke that France would not attack through Belgium, owing to the practical certainty that England would, in these circumstances, feel bound to intervene. And in view of possible embroilment with a third opponent—Russia—the war would have to be conducted, certainly at first, on the defensive. In spite of the difficulties of the situation it would, however, be extremely undesirable to buy off France, since the very least voluntary cession of Prussian territory to France would make Prussia's leadership in Germany impossible.

This expression of opinion determined Bismarck's resolution. Certainly there should be no cession of territory to France, but on the other hand no encouraging Italy to engage in war.



"Moltke's plan," he said, "is then for the defensive in Bohemia and the defensive on the Rhine ; this might keep up a long time and bring still other interventions down on us. If Moltke had proposed first to finish up Austria thoroughly and then to drive out the French, even if in the meantime they had reached Berlin, I could have understood it better ; but played on defensive lines the game is too high for me ; we will try to make peace."<sup>1</sup>

The definitive Treaty of Peace was concluded at Prag on August 23. Hanover, Nassau, and Hesse-Cassel were annexed as well as the town of Frankfort, the erstwhile headquarters of the Federal Diet ; Austria was forced to withdraw completely from German affairs ; Germany, north of the Main, together with Saxony, was to be included in a Federation under Prussian leadership ; while for the States of Southern Germany there was reserved the right of entering into some kind of national bond with the Northern League. Further, Prussia's sovereignty in Schleswig-Holstein was recognized in principle. In seven weeks of warfare Prussia had thus won for herself pre-eminence in Germany, and a place among the great nations of Europe. The annexations had added a population of four millions to the Prussian kingdom, and had given it a continuous territory. Jena, with its degradation, was wiped out, and Moltke had taken his place amongst the great captains of history.

The brilliant success of Moltke's strategy gave rise to a school which laid down as an axiom that the strategic advance should almost always be by concentric operations. It was held that the advantage of speed thus gained outweighed the loss of unity of command, especially as the latter drawback could be avoided by the appointment of commanders who could be trusted in all circumstances to act in conformity with a given strategic policy. This theory, however, was analysed afresh by German strategists towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the opinion previously passed upon it was in part revised. Von der Goltz contrasts two systems and reserves judgment :

<sup>1</sup> Sybel, *Die Begründung des Deutschen Reiches*, Eng. Trans. vol. v. pp. 425, 426 ; Moltke, *Militärische Korrespondenz*, i., iii. p. 69, No. 6.

"Napoleon," he wrote, "looked upon his army as a single mass, united beforehand, with which he was wont to hurl himself against the enemy. On the other hand, Frederick the Great in 1757 and Moltke in 1866 effected the invasion of Bohemia with separated armies, whose junction was only brought about upon the battle-field. Napoleon was a partisan of the system of preparatory grouping of his forces; Moltke united them only on the field. Both principles, though diametrically opposed to each other, brought about great results. It is impossible to say that one is superior to the other. Each corresponds to a certain definite strategic situation."<sup>1</sup>

Bernhardi goes somewhat further and points out that the concentric march of several armies has positive disadvantages when employed against an enterprising enemy:

"Junction on the battle-field," he wrote, "has hitherto been regarded as the best method. It is doubtful, however, whether the grouping of the forces can invariably be carried out under favourable conditions. When the enemy fails to exploit his cavalry to the full, renounces the initiative, and allows himself to be dictated to by his opponent, then the operation of marching to a common centre can be carried out with exactness. But when the enemy has sufficient confidence in himself to take the initiative, and the battle-field changes daily, so that it is impossible to foresee where exactly junction ought to be made, then any attempt to advance by separate columns will merely lead to wasted effort and defeat in detail. If both adversaries manœuvre then the advantage will pertain to the one who can dispose of numerical superiority at the point of collision. To allow this concentration to depend on the movements of one's adversary is to submit oneself to his will instead of imposing one's own will on him."<sup>2</sup>

These quotations will show that the absolute confidence once reposed in Moltke's strategic method has been somewhat modified by time. Without doubt, Benedek was defeated on interior lines, and Moltke secured victory by marches towards a common centre. "The instruction to be gained from such experience is, however," remarks General von Boguslawski, "that victory is achieved neither by

<sup>1</sup> Von der Goltz, *Kriegführung*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Von Bernhardi, *Militär-Wochenblatt*, 1898, No. 9, p. 443.

interior nor exterior lines, but by the commander and his army." <sup>1</sup>

These analyses of the campaign of 1866, written by competent critics, merit close study, but it is a question whether they are not eclipsed in interest by the remarks of a writer who based his opinions on evidence gained at first hand and at the time. Towards the end of July, 1866, the French Emperor had sent Colonel Stoffel, his orderly officer, to Bohemia with directions to study and report on the chief features of the war. This officer proceeded to Prag, the headquarters of Prince Frederick Charles, by whom he was given every facility to carry out his mission.

Colonel Stoffel does not mince matters in putting forth what he considers to have been the underlying cause of the dazzling and rapid success obtained by the Prussians.

"In this war," he says, "on one side—that of Austria—an inferior weapon was put into the hands of a commander incapable of using it; while on the other side—that of Prussia—a superior weapon carefully prepared for many years, was placed in the hands of an able leader. Or, to put it in another way, on one side there was an army inferior in every respect, commanded by a man who did not possess the qualities requisite for a commander-in-chief, while on the other there was an army superior in every respect, commanded by able, well-taught, and energetic leaders."

The criticism is a sweeping one. But though it is brief, and was formed without the advantage of study which only lapse of time can afford, it conveys, after all, in a few sentences the gist of the volumes of detailed analysis which have since appeared.

The superiority of the Prussian army over that of Austria was not, in Colonel Stoffel's opinion, confined to any one grade. The officers as a body were superior—especially the higher officers, and the company commanders. The non-commissioned officers were superior. Superior also were the private soldiers. Particular stress is laid on the fact that the principle of universal compulsory service brought into the ranks an element of the highest value, by which the intelli-

<sup>1</sup> Von Boguslawski, *Betrachtungen über Heerwesen und Kriegführung*, p. 121.



gence and *moral* of the army were increased, and Colonel Stoffel laments the handicap under which the French army laboured, owing to the system of substitution by which young men of the richer and more educated classes avoided military service. In his opinion the rigidity with which the principle of universal service was applied in Prussia brought into being an army superior not only to that of Austria, but to any in Europe.

Of particular interest are the views of Colonel Stoffel upon the share which the Prussian needle-gun had in bringing about the Prussian victories. He roundly declares that it is an absolute error to consider that it was merely to the mechanical features of this new weapon that victory was pre-eminently due. And this view, it should be noted, is not based on mere personal bias, but upon conversation with a great number of Prussian officers, and non-commissioned officers, as well as with Austrian prisoners. Wherein the value of the needle-gun lay was, according to Colonel Stoffel, first, in the moral effect conferred by dinning into the Prussian recruit, day in and day out, the statement that he had the best rifle in Europe ; and, secondly, and even more important, in the care bestowed on musketry training in the Prussian army. Two methods of firing were employed in the Prussian infantry—volleys and independent rapid fire. But although it was for the latter that the needle-gun possessed an outstanding superiority over the Austrian muzzle-loader, Colonel Stoffel distinctly states, “ it is the volleys which are so formidable.” Possibly the opinion might have been better worded by saying that fire discipline, the result of sound musketry training and plenty of range practice—the Prussian infantrymen fired annually over 100 rounds of ball—will always come into its own.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE YEARS BETWEEN—THE OUTBREAK OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR—MOLTKE'S PLAN OF OPERATIONS

ON August 3, 1866, General Headquarters of the Prussian army had returned to Berlin, and twenty days later, when the Peace of Prague had been signed, the withdrawal of the troops began. The return march through the Fatherland was one long fête. Every village was decked out in its gayest colours to greet the victorious columns, and brilliant was the formal entry into Berlin, which took place on September 21. Outside the Brandenburg Gate the King of Prussia was received by his troops with vociferous cheers, and took his place at their head. The order of march was quickly formed, and close behind the head of the triumphal column rode General von Roon, the Minister of War, and General von Moltke, the Chief of the Staff. The greeting accorded these two was loud and long; though eclipsed, undoubtedly, by the enthusiasm which hailed the King, followed by his son and Prince Frederick Charles.

It was a noticeable feature of the celebrations that gratification for peace was swallowed up by the passionate desire to extol the military might of Prussia, and an eye-witness has placed on record his impression of the spirit which dominated Berlin in the hour of victory:

In many places words of welcome to the returning soldiers, or mottoes recording victory, were traced in lamps which burnt with coloured flames. But nowhere was to be seen a single congratulation for peace. Every fiery inscription, every device of flame, told of the fierce joy of the people for victory and conquest, and to the minds of many men foreboded that thirst for further war and for military glory was taking a strong hold of the heart of Prussia.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hozier, *The Seven Weeks' War*, p. 465, 1867.

To Moltke the greatest result of the war was that Prussia had found herself, and that Germany could now call herself Germany, and face the future with a serene confidence. As to his own share in it, he merely saw that he had done his duty. The frenzied adulation of the mob fretted him. Referring to his share of the general glory, he said :

I hate all fulsome praise. It completely upsets me for the whole day. Ay, the Bohemian campaign is a great and deathless page in the world's history, an event the importance of which it is now impossible to fathom. In this campaign I but did my duty, and my comrades did theirs, too. God's omnipotence led on our banner to victory, He alone lent strength to our army, vigilance to our generals, and success to my plans. And when I listen to all the exaggerated flattery which the public sees fit to bestow upon me, I can only think how it would have been if this victory, this triumph, had not been ours. Would not this self-same praise have changed to indiscriminate censure, to senseless blame ?

And the victor had a generous thought for his beaten opponent :

A vanquished commander ! Oh ! if outsiders could form but a faint conception of what that means ! The Austrian Headquarters on the night of Königgrätz—I cannot bear to think of it. A general, too, so deserving, so brave, and so cautious.

The year 1867 with its exhibition gave Moltke the chance of viewing his next opponents at close quarters. All the world flocked to Paris. King William and a bevy of Prussian princes were among the distinguished guests. With the King came also Moltke and Bismarck. The Chief of the Staff talked with Niel and Canrobert, witnessed a review of the Imperial Guard and an army corps—the equipment and horses struck him as being excellent—and in his silent way garnered some first-hand information of the army whose possibilities had been tabulated, précised, and indexed by him for years in his office at Berlin. In this year, too, the scheme for co-ordinating German railway traffic in war received the royal assent ; it was the outcome of a committee appointed immediately after the war of 1866, under the



supervision of Moltke, to profit by the lessons of that campaign, and was kept secret until the time came to apply it in practice against France in 1870.

For a time, though, Moltke's thoughts were for a quiet life. As far back as 1848, the year of revolution, he had contemplated giving up a military career and retiring into private life. "My favourite thought," he wrote to his brother Adolf in the July of that year, "is still that some day we may have a family gathering on an estate—I should prefer one in our dear German land." But though the wish to possess his own piece of ground—*unius sese dominum fecisse lacertae*—had been deeply rooted in his heart for years, it was not to be realized until he was nearly sixty-eight. After the successful campaign of 1866 the gratitude of his country provided him with a grant which enabled him to purchase an estate. At first he thought of his ancestral Mecklenburg, where was situated the property which had been in the possession of his ancestors, descending from father to son in unbroken succession, down to the time of his grandfather. The sum of money at his disposal—£30,000—was not, however, sufficient for the purpose; but during a journey through Silesia on staff duty, in the late summer of 1868, he came across an estate for sale near Schweidnitz, and quickly decided to secure it.

Though busy with his military duties at Berlin and elsewhere, as well as with his attendance at the meetings of the Zollparlament, Moltke found time to attend to the various requirements of a country gentleman's life at Creisau—as the estate was called. The reconstruction of the manor-house and outbuildings called for much thought—and Moltke insisted on "good English slates" for the roofing. A village school, a children's savings bank, a free library, an infant school—all these, as well as some business-like farming and the laying out of a park, were the delight of the leisure hours of the victor of Königgrätz. In everything connected with the property there was revealed the strictly economical mind of the owner; but it was an economy totally divorced from meanness and amounted merely to a rigid determination to avoid unnecessary expense. Here Moltke spent one happy summer, that of 1868, with his wife. It was probably

the happiest period of his life, but it was to be darkened by a loss from which he never recovered.

In the autumn Moltke and his wife while out riding were overtaken by heavy rain, and Frau von Moltke, who was engaged at some local fête, had perforce to attend the ceremony in her wet clothes. A violent fever was the result, and although for a time it appeared as if she would recover, her illness took an unfavourable turn, and she passed away after weeks of suffering on Christmas Eve, 1868. In her last hour she asked for God's blessing on her husband, and her last conscious act was to make signs for her wedding-ring to be brought to her, and to place it on Moltke's finger. She died with a prayer for the King upon her lips. In a brief letter to one of his brothers, Moltke tells of the alternations of hope and despair which "broke us all down at last." "She fell asleep," he wrote, "to awake in a better world from which I would not recall her if I could." Few marriages have ever been blessed with more unclouded happiness than that of Moltke and his wife, and his true heart never ceased to mourn for her.

There is no surer anodyne for grief than hard, incessant brain-work, and Moltke was fortunate in that his vocation compelled him to apply it. The news of Königgrätz had electrified Europe. The balance of power had been rudely disturbed; and the years which followed the eviction of Austria from Germany were employed by the Prussian General Staff in preparation for the greater war with France, which every thinking soldier regarded as inevitable. By the annexation of 1866 the army of King William was increased by four corps, or by seven, if the contingents of the South German states be reckoned. That is to say, more than 200,000 additional troops would be available in the struggle. In addition, the staff had turned to account in the most thorough and skilful way the experience gained in 1866, and the faults then brought to light were sedulously corrected. Particular attention was devoted to mobilization and to utilizing the railway system of Germany to the fullest extent for massing troops quickly on the frontier. The main features of the arrangements for securing speed in mobilization were the working of the territorial system, and an

almost complete decentralization in matters of equipment, transport, and supply. The whole time for mobilization and deployment into position, which had amounted to nearly five weeks in 1866, was, by 1870, reduced to eighteen days—eight and ten respectively.

Ever since his appointment as Chief of the Staff, the drawing up of a plan of operations against Prussia's western neighbour had constantly occupied Moltke's attention ; but after the successful issue of the Seven Weeks' War the necessity for being prepared at a moment's notice to take the field against France had become a matter of imperative urgency. It has been told how, within a few days of Sadowa, Moltke had been called upon to submit a Memorandum embodying his proposals in view of the hostile attitude of Napoleon III., and, during the two following years, the plans were revised and strengthened in what appeared to be the weak points in their construction. During the winter of 1868-1869 a further lengthy Memorandum was drawn up, to be revised in the latter year and again on the eve of the Franco-German war. In this appreciation Moltke contemplated the hostility of Austria, in alliance with France ; but on the other hand he counted upon at least the benevolent neutrality, and probably something more, of Russia—a feature which distinguishes it from the Memorandum of August 8, 1866.<sup>1</sup> He laid down clearly that Prussia should at once take the initiative against France, so as to deal her a crushing blow before the more slowly mobilizing Austria could get into her stride. And he pointed out that the French temperament would throw to the winds any idea of merely delaying the Prussians, once French soil had been entered by the invaders. In these circumstances the French would rush to battle without waiting for the assistance of their ally, and the struggle would open in conditions favourable to Prussia. Briefly then, the policy was to be defensive against Austria, and offensive against France. To deal with the former he proposed to allot three army corps and a couple of Landwehr divisions, while the task of crushing France he proposed to carry out with ten corps. For the defence against any possible hostile landing on the Prussian

<sup>1</sup> See p. 163.



coast-line some Landwehr divisions would be made available, and one division of the regular army would be earmarked for watching Denmark.

To take first the defensive campaign against Austria, that State had placed 340,000 men in the field in 1866, and it had taken her four months to do it. These factors could be taken as fixed, for there was no reason to suppose that either Austria's man-power had increased or that her mobilization arrangements had improved. And since that year two strategic considerations had arisen which would compensate for the absence of Italy from the side of Prussia. Bavaria was bound to Prussia by a military treaty, and Russia *ex hypothesi* would have to be reckoned with by Austria as a possible opponent. Austria's strategic freedom would, therefore, be considerably restricted. She would be compelled to occupy certain strategic points and to post, in addition, an army of observation near Olmütz to watch Russia, and another on the lower Inn facing the Bavarians. By so much would her mobile striking force be weakened for an attack on Prussia.

As regards the Austrian objective, everything pointed to the probability of an advance direct from Bohemia on Berlin; and to confront this offensive Moltke earmarked the Ist and IInd Corps, reinforced by two Landwehr divisions, 83,000 men all told. In addition, the VIth Corps was posted in Silesia, so that Moltke could count upon over 113,000 of all ranks to deal with an Austrian invasion. It was recognized that, should the enemy offensive be pushed with vigour, the best method for checking the advance on Berlin would be to take up a flanking position either on the east or on the west of the Austrian line of march. In either case a river line was available for the Prussians—the Elbe, if the thrust was to be made against the Austrian left flank, or the Oder, if against the enemy's right. Moltke favoured the Elbe, and proposed to put the bulk of his available field army (Ist and IInd Corps, 1st and 3rd Landwehr Divisions, and a cavalry division) at Dresden. The VIth Corps would be about Neisse in southern Silesia, and, to ensure communication between these two widely separated wings, a second cavalry division was to take post about Görlitz.

The plan of dealing with France being offensive in character was naturally more straightforward, and in its broader aspect consisted merely in searching for the principal mass of the enemy's forces, and falling on it whenever found, with the general idea, underlying this project, of driving the French armies from the fertile southern departments into the narrower tracts of the north. Numerical superiority would be on the side of the Prussians, and the main, perhaps the only, difficulty was to ensure that such superiority could be made available at the right moment and the right place.

As regards numbers, a factor which was at the root of Moltke's calculations, he was at first inclined to put the total force which France could mobilize at 336,000 men. Of these, 40,000 would be locked up in Algiers and in Rome, and from the remaining 296,000 at least 50,000 would be required as fortress garrisons, including Paris. One division, too, might possibly be required to watch the Spanish frontier, so that the French would be hard put to place an army of even 250,000 in the field. A further revision, however, early in 1870, led Moltke to estimate that the French field army would reach 300,000. The ten Prussian and Bavarian corps, on the other hand, would amount to 330,000 men, while Baden and Würtemberg would add 30,000 more, or 360,000 in all. Although the further scrutiny by Moltke had led him to raise his estimate of the available French field army, a similar process eventually, in July 1870, emboldened him to assess the numbers of Germans to be put in the field as 400,000. It is always a matter of difficulty to follow and check calculations as to numbers when such factors as the difference between fighting and active strength, between mobile and immobile formations, and between active and reserve troops have to be allowed for impartially as regards either combatant. But it is clear from Moltke's Memorandum that, even assuming that Austria should also take the field against Prussia, the latter Power would have a distinct numerical superiority over France, and were Austria to stand outside the arena, the superiority would be so marked as to be almost overwhelming.

As regards the probable theatre of operations, the only frontier common to France and Germany lay between

Luxemburg and Basle. Only by violating the neutrality of one or more States could operations be extended outside this zone. Such action was no part of Moltke's plan, nor did he think that the French would on their part contemplate an advance through Belgium. He considered, indeed, that to do so would be a positive strategic hindrance to them, owing to the practical certainty of intervention by England. Similarly, if the French were to endeavour to join hands with their Austrian allies through Switzerland their forces would be weakened by at least 100,000 men, to hold that country. Further, neither France nor Austria had any interest in an immediate junction, for although they had one end in common, the destruction of Prussia, their immediate objectives were not one and the same.

Taking into consideration the movements which the French were capable of, Moltke came to the conclusion that, owing to the geographical situation of France and the lie of her railway system, the French main army would possibly assemble in two groups, the main group in Lorraine about Metz, and a second and smaller group in Alsace, the two main detraining centres being the strong fortresses of Metz and Strasburg respectively, which were separated from each other by the lesser elevations of the Vosges mountains. The Alsace group would doubtless have for its objective the South German States, but the railway factor would lead to its being for a time too weak for such a task, and it would probably be necessary for it to wait for reinforcement from the group round Metz before taking the offensive. The delay would give Moltke the opportunity of acting on interior lines from the Palatinate, and of striking at each of the two French groups in quick succession. On the other hand, should an offensive of the French from Metz and Strasburg forestall the Germans, the former would be able to repeat Moltke's own strategy of 1866, for it would be then extremely difficult to prevent the two French wings from uniting by concentric marches on enemy soil.

In view of the above considerations, Moltke concluded that the German territory on the left bank of the Rhine—Rhenish Prussia and the Bavarian Palatinate—was the fittest area for concentrating the great bulk of the German forces. Such



a concentration would be extremely close to the frontier ; but Moltke considered that to carry it out would involve no undue risk, for the mobilization and railway programme, worked out in minute detail, showed that by the fifteenth day the bulk of two army corps could be in position ; five days later the Germans would have 300,000 combatants at their destinations, and by the twenty-fourth day all the armies would be posted, complete with all their trains. Such were the figures worked on in 1868-1869, but, as a matter of fact, by July 1870 it was possible to advance the programme by at least two days.

The area of concentration chosen by Moltke would enable the Germans to advance in every direction, even in the unlikely case of the French violating the neutrality of Belgium, and marching through that country. At the same time it was the best method for defending South Germany. For, if the French should advance from Strasburg, the Germans, holding the passages of the Rhine, could be in a position to meet them with superior forces on either bank of that river. In a word, the position selected by Moltke was, so far as the strategic defensive was concerned, the echo of the place he favoured for checking an Austrian advance on Berlin—a position on the enemy's flank—which was in turn imbued with the idea which he had submitted to the Sultan's general a generation earlier in Asia Minor.

A cardinal feature of Moltke's plan was the conviction that the French mobilization could not be effected more rapidly than that of the Germans. There was, however, the possibility to be reckoned with that the French might essay a dash with imperfectly mobilized forces, so as to seize the initiative at the outset. Thanks to their number of garrisons in the north-east, and their good railway system, the French could, without waiting for their reservists, concentrate very rapidly 150,000 men ; and to do so Moltke considered would be in harmony with French national characteristics. But even if such a force could assemble round Metz on the fifth day, and should cross the frontier at once, and well furnished with artillery, Moltke was not without a plan to meet it. The area of the German concentration would have to be shifted back east of the Rhine, and although such an opera-

tion—simple though it seems on paper—would be one of very great difficulty, a well-trained staff would not find it insuperable. To reach the Rhine would be six days' march for the French from Sarrelouis, and they could, even for a dash, scarcely be prepared to cross the frontier eight days from the order to mobilize. By the fourteenth day, however, the Germans would have a superior force upon the Rhine in possession of all the crossings, and, a few days later, would be able to pass to the offensive, with a strength double that of the French. In these circumstances, Moltke considered that a sudden dash by the French with half mobilized forces would be an operation so dangerous for them as to render it, though not impossible, yet improbable.

In the area of concentration Moltke proposed to assemble three armies. The Ist Army, round Treves and the Lower Sarre, would consist of two corps or 60,000 men, and would form the right. On the left, about Landau and Rastatt, would be the IIIrd Army, consisting of two corps, two South German divisions, and a Bavarian brigade, amounting in all to some 99,000 of all ranks; and in the event of the two Bavarian corps becoming available, they were to be added to this IIIrd Army, then bringing the total to 131,000. The IIInd Army of four corps (131,000 men) was to form the centre, and a strong general reserve was to be posted about Mainz. The grand total would then amount to 353,000 men, or with the two Bavarian corps, 384,000. And in the event of Austria not coming forward as the ally of France the fighting strength of the Germans would be increased by the three corps left as an army of observation, about 100,000 all told.

Criticism of the solution arrived at by Moltke in his appreciation falls naturally into three heads: criticism as regards the choice of the objective he laid down to be reached; of the area selected for his strategic deployment; and of the strategic deployment itself. As regards the first, Moltke, after showing conclusively the numerical superiority which Germany would have over France, begins his Memorandum by deprecating in the clearest manner the pursuit of any geographical objective. "Our object," he wrote, "is to seek out the main enemy mass and to attack it, wherever

found." It became, therefore, a question of effecting the union of his forces, for the offensive, and of making all the masses of German troops converge towards the chief enemy mass, so as to overwhelm it, a conception, as General Bonnal observes, *beaucoup plus nette* than that of 1866. At the same time it must be remarked—though General Bonnal fails to do so—that writing many years later, Moltke himself said :

In his plan of war submitted by the Chief of the Staff and accepted by the King, the former had his eye fixed, from the first, *upon the capture of the enemy's capital*, the possession of which is of more importance than in other countries.<sup>1</sup>

As regards his choice of an area of concentration, in selecting the south of Rhenish Prussia, and the Bavarian Palatinate, Moltke gave as his opinion that "the assembly of our main forces in this area will cover the Lower as well as the Upper Rhine, and will permit us to pass to an offensive which, if the right moment is seized, will forestall any advance of the French into German territory." There is thus no question of endeavouring to cover every threatened spot, and the improvement of this method over that adopted in 1866 is—as General Bonnal justly observes—very marked. A corollary to this decision to refuse to be led into direct covering everywhere was that the necessity to effect the junction of two widely separated wings in enemy territory no longer confronted Moltke. This daring experiment had been tried in 1866, with dazzling success. But although it was in harmony with Frederician traditions, and had been hailed after its recent exploitation with paeans of praise, Moltke was far too level-headed a strategist to forget that it had been after all but a brilliant way out of a very difficult position into which he had been put against his will. In 1866 Moltke had been hampered by political issues and by the hesitation of his sovereign. Now, however, the triumph of 1866 had ensured for him a far freer hand, and he reverted to a method less showy, but far more sound. Curiously enough the lie of the frontier—inasmuch as Alsace and

<sup>1</sup> Field-Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, *The Franco-German War*, vol. i., English Translation, p. 10. Italics not in the original.



Lorraine formed a far more real projection into Germany than did Saxony and Bohemia into Prussia <sup>1</sup>—would appear at first sight to lend itself to concentric marches by widely separated wings. The topographical features of Alsace—the river line of the Rhine, the fortress of Strasburg, and the Vosges mountains—would, however, have put the difficulties of the Bohemian passes quite in the shade. And even if they had not, it is extremely improbable that Moltke would have overlooked the inherent drawback of exterior lines, especially as the element of surprise could not have existed four years after the dramatic success of 1866.

Although both the choice of objective selected by Moltke and that of the area chosen for the strategic deployment have called forth high praise from the most competent critics of war, the manner in which it was proposed to carry out the strategic deployment itself has been severely criticized. So great was the confidence of Moltke in the superior mobilization arrangements of Germany that he proposed to assemble his armies close up to the French frontier without any real protection against the sudden irruption of an enemy advanced guard:

“From the tenth day,” says the Memorandum, as revised in the summer of 1870, “the first units will begin detraining not far from the French frontier; on the thirteenth day the fighting strength of two corps will be assembled there. By the eighteenth day the number of our forces will reach 300,000, and finally, on the twentieth day this mass will be supplied with practically all its transport.”

Thus—as General Bonnal puts it—for ten days there would be no protection whatever; at the end of the thirteen days there would be protection certainly, but a precarious security dependent on merely two corps, incomplete and insufficiently supplied with trains and ammunition; and up to the end of the concentration a complete absence of advanced guards. Such a concentration could only hope for a successful issue in face of an opponent *frappé d'immobilité*.

The sweeping statement of the French critic as to the complete absence of protection during the first ten days

<sup>1</sup> See p. 108.

needs, however, a slight modification. There were in existence, in peace time, frontier garrisons whose mission, in the event of war, was to act as *troupes de couverture*. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the protection contemplated by Moltke consisted merely of two infantry brigades, a brigade of cavalry, and a battery, spaced out along a front of nearly eighty miles between Treves and Landau. And when it is borne in mind that the eastern Departments of France contained a large fraction of the total of the French peace garrisons, and particularly of cavalry—four regiments of cuirassiers alone being stationed at Lunéville—and that the railway system towards the east was adapted for a quick concentration, Moltke's failure to provide greater protection during the proposed concentration of the German armies near the frontier does certainly seem to call for comment. The expedient of dealing with a French dash into Germany by causing the German troops to detrain on the east instead of the west of the Rhine, would mean, after all, the renouncing to some extent of the plan underlying the Memorandum of 1868-1869, and General Bonnal considers that in this Moltke showed himself a captain of a different order to Napoleon. The latter when he marshalled his forces for grand operations took care to protect this mass against all risk, and did not pass to the offensive until he felt completely ready. Moltke, on the other hand, though contemplating the offensive, proposed to expose himself to the risk of having his initial concentration disturbed, and of being forced to abandon the offensive altogether, in consequence, even if but for a time.

While the Memorandum which was to decide the fate of France was being shaped and re-shaped by the master hand of Moltke, political events were tending rapidly to the inevitable war which was to put the work to the test. In France the zenith of the Second Empire had been reached in 1859, and the successful campaigns in the Crimea and in Italy had added to her great military reputation. But thereafter the mistakes of Napoleon III. weakened his own position as emperor and dimmed the prestige of the nation. The wholly ineffective efforts made by him on behalf of the Poles alienated Russia. Greater still, however, was the loss

of prestige due to the mistake of 1863, when he plunged into Mexican politics with the dangerous project of founding a Roman Catholic empire in Central America, and thereby, too, locking up no small part of his army in the New World, when its presence was urgently required in Europe near the Rhine. In the midst of these difficulties the decisive victory won by Prussia at Königgrätz came as a serious blow. The prestige lost in Mexico and Poland had to be retrieved, and diplomatic feelers for compensation for France—first out of actual German territory, and later in the shape of Belgium, or at any rate, Luxemburg—were put forward. But these hints, though they were emphasized by the bellicose oratory of the Chamber of Deputies, drew from Bismarck nothing more substantial than the publication of the hitherto secret military alliances concluded between Prussia and the South German States. Thus the unification of Germany by Prussia, which the almost unanimous opinion of France had declared must be prevented at all hazard, was now seen to be a definite and accomplished fact.

To the weather-wise in political meteorology the first mutterings of the storm were now clearly audible, though the tempest was preceded by a lull which misled those whose prescience was less acute. On July 5, 1870, Earl Granville took possession of the Foreign Office in London, and was informed by the permanent head of the department that never in his experience had he known such a state of quiet in foreign affairs. Twenty-four hours later the invitation to Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a kinsman of the King of Prussia, to accept the vacant Spanish throne, put all Europe on the alert. In Paris the news caused a violent outbreak of political feeling. The *Temps* explained grandiloquently that the Empire of Charles V. was being revived, while the *Débats* refused to believe that a scheme so monstrous was probable. The Duc de Gramont declared that the interests and honour of France were imperilled; and the French newspapers ostentatiously announced that they were no longer able to publish information as to the movements of French troops. It would have been well for France had this self-abnegation on the part of the Press continued after war had actually begun.



To a week of frenzied excitement there came as an anti-climax the news of the withdrawal by Prince Leopold of his candidature for the throne, and all cause for war had apparently been removed. Nevertheless, before three days had passed the boulevards were packed with tens of thousands shouting *À Berlin*, and at the same time 100,000 Berliners were roaring out the Prussian national anthem in front of the King of Prussia's palace. The happenings of those three brief days are familiar knowledge. How the French ambassador met the King on the promenade at Ems on the 13th, and made the unexpected request that his Majesty should never again give his consent to the candidature of his kinsman should it be revived; how the King declined somewhat curtly to give the assurance *à tout jamais*; and how later, to a request from the ambassador for another audience, he sent a message to the effect that he had no further communication to make, are knowledge common to every schoolboy.

By a coincidence somewhat resembling the condition of affairs in the fateful days of 1914, the guiding spirits of Prussian affairs—the King, Bismarck, Moltke, and Roon—were all absent from Berlin during the first stage of the crisis, which ended in war. Moltke was ruralizing on his estate at Creisau. While driving, during the 11th, with his brother Adolf and the latter's family, the carriage was stopped by a telegraph messenger, just where a ford passes over the little river Peile. The general took the despatch, read it, and placed it quietly in his pocket without comment, and it was only a certain absent-mindedness—betrayed by some alarming driving—which made his companions speculate on the contents of the telegram. Arriving home he made but the brief announcement, "It is a stupid thing, but I must go to Berlin to-night." At the evening meal he was his own quiet but cheerful self; but even his will power could not restrain indefinitely the excitement which consumed him. Rising abruptly, he struck the table with his clenched fist and cried, "Well, let them come, with or without South Germany, we are prepared." The telegram was from the King to say that in view of the international situation he intended to order the mobilization of the army.

The following night Moltke dined with Bismarck, and Roon was a fellow-guest. The meal—as an overture to a campaign—fell flat, for during its course news came in of the renunciation of Prince Leopold. At the close of the evening Bismarck bade his guests join him the following night, but the feast when it took place was no brighter than that of the evening before. Both Roon and Moltke were *sehr niedergeschlagen*, but in the midst of a forced conversation there arrived a long cipher telegram from Ems, which proved a welcome interruption. From the deciphering there gradually emerged a full account of the incident of the French ambassador's persistence, and of King William's refusal to grant a further audience. The despatch—which was from Abeken to Bismarck—closed with the words, "His Majesty leaves it to Your Excellency to decide whether Benedetti's fresh demand and its rejection should be at once communicated to our ambassadors, to foreign nations, and to the Press."

New life was breathed into the two guests as Bismarck at once set about cutting down the telegram to a form, which, although preserving all the meaning, expressed it in a blunt and almost insulting form. It was deliberately intended to be a "red rag to the Gallic bull," and gladdened the gloomy hearts of Moltke and Roon at that memorable meal. When the edited version was read out Moltke exclaimed that, whereas the original read like an order to retreat, the revision was like the signal to charge. Roon cried out ecstatically, "Our God of old lives still, and will not let us perish in disgrace." To a question from Bismarck as to Prussia's prospects in such a war, Moltke replied, "I believe that we are superior to them; but I make this reservation that no one can foresee the result of a great battle." But his words, cautious though they sounded, were imbued with no doubt. Striking his breast with his hand he exclaimed fervently, "If only I can live to lead our armies in this war, then the devil may come as soon after as he likes for this old carcase."

The abbreviated despatch was flashed over Europe. Germany was beside itself with delight at the rebuke to the French ambassador, while France was roused into a state of

passionate resentment.<sup>1</sup> The publication of Bismarck's telegram became known in Paris on the 14th. On that day the Council of Ministers met three times. At the first meeting the advocates of peace were still in the majority. In the afternoon session it was decided to call out the reserves ; yet the Emperor himself seemed still inclined for peace. At the third meeting Napoleon gave way to the threats and importunities of the war party, and to the entreaties and reproaches of the ultramontane Empress. Napoleon probably realized that only by successful war could the fate of his dynasty be secured. As Moltke, years later, observed, "A Napoleon on the throne of France was bound to establish his rights by political and military successes. Only for a time did the victories won by French arms in distant countries give general satisfaction ; the triumphs of the Prussian armies excited jealousy ; they were regarded as arrogant ; as a challenge ; and the French demanded 'Revenge for Sadowa.' The liberal spirit of the epoch was opposed by the autocratic government of the Emperor ; he was forced to make concessions ; his civil authority was weakened ; and one fine day the nation was informed by its representatives that it desired war with Germany." However this may be, the French government took immediate steps to "safeguard the interests and honour of France," and the declaration of war reached Berlin on the 19th.

During the evening of July 15 the King of Prussia returned to Berlin where he was met by the Crown Prince, Bismarck, Moltke, and Roon and acclaimed with frenzied delight by the assembled crowds. Towards midnight the Chief of the Staff had to repair to the palace to take His Majesty's instructions, and on his way a surging mob cheered itself hoarse at the sight of Germany's hope—the victor of Königgrätz, the expectant confidence of his fellow-countrymen being voiced by a street arab's shout, "*Nanu Moltkemachman wieder en juten Plan!*" During the night the wires throughout North Germany were speeding everywhere the laconic message, "Krieg Mobil," to be followed within a few hours

<sup>1</sup> According to a tradition in the French diplomatic service the insult offered to France lay not in Bismarck's despatch, but in an unprintable epithet applied to the French ambassador by the King of Prussia.



by similar messages to the south. After July 15 Moltke could find time to read French novels, and could say that he was spending the easiest days of his life. At 6 P.M. on the 31st the Royal Headquarters left Berlin for the seat of war, steaming for two days and nights through a perpetual *Wacht am Rhein*, relaxation being found during the journey in whist, for which Moltke had a well-known partiality, but in which he ever showed very indifferent skill. On the morning of August 2 Headquarters were established at Mainz; but scarcely had the various offices been set up when a telegram announced serious fighting at Saarbrücken, and the retreat of the Prussian garrison.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—THE FRENCH PLAN OF OPERATIONS

ALTHOUGH France was at a heavy disadvantage as regards numbers compared with Germany, she had, nevertheless, certain assets—actual and potential—to throw into the other scale. Actually she was, by sea, far more powerful than her rival, and it was, therefore, not unreasonable to consider that a definite fraction of the North German forces would be locked up along the Prussian coast line to deal with a possible French landing. Then, as regards armament, the infantry chassepôt rifle was superior to the needle-gun, both in range and flatness of trajectory; although its very superiority in these respects and its rapidity of fire—eleven rounds a minute—led to a mistaken predilection for defensive tactics. Much, too, was expected from the *mitrailleuse*, a 25-barrelled machine-gun, employed in batteries as a field artillery weapon, but destined to fall far short of the value put upon it. The potential asset was the possibility of securing Austria and Italy as allies; and negotiations—secret but satisfactory up to a certain point—had been entered into with these Powers. Unfortunately, however, for Napoleon III. a religious factor thrust itself forward. The dogma of Papal Infallibility had, by July 1870, come to be a vital issue in the Catholic world, and it was actually decreed the very day before war was declared by France. Italy clamoured for possession of Rome, and it was a terrible prospect for the “eldest son of the church” to hand over that city, at the time garrisoned by French troops, to a liberal and anti-papal nation. But there was no escape from the dilemma. Either Napoleon must go to war with the shouts

of "Judas" hurled at him by pious Roman Catholics, or he must try his fortunes without the much coveted help of Italy and Austria, for unless Italy came in Austria would not budge. He chose the latter alternative, largely, it would seem, owing to the influence of his vehemently Catholic Empress, that Empress who is said to have declared "better Prussians in Paris than Italian troops in Rome."

As regards a plan of campaign, in 1868 there had been drawn up, under the direction of Marshal Niel, a scheme of operations which was to be carried out by three field armies, supported by three others in reserve, stationed at Paris, Lyons, and Toulouse respectively. This plan, which was primarily defensive in scope, had been worked out to such final detail that the names of the army commanders had been provisionally inserted in pencil upon the Emperor's copy, so that merely the action of inking them in was required to make these appointments official. In March 1870, however, Napoleon III. had consulted the Austrian Archduke Albert upon the scheme, and the latter had adversely criticized the formation of separate armies, and had strongly urged the union of all the French forces under the Emperor's own hand. Napoleon was taken with the suggestion, but failed to inform his military advisers of the fact, and it was not until July 11, 1870, that Le Bœuf learnt that his master had decided upon abandoning the scheme upon which the Minister of War had based all his calculations, and that one single army, consisting of eight corps, including the Guard, was to be formed under the Emperor's sole command.

The marshal submitted, though not without energetic protest, to his sovereign's proposal, and extracted a promise that the staffs of such corps as were commanded by marshals might be made sufficiently large to allow for their ultimate expansion into armies should the necessity arise. This compromise, however, could not alter the fact that practically a new plan of operations had come into being, and a further change was rendered necessary by the declaration of war having been made by France. It was now considered of primary importance that any idea of an initial defensive policy should be set aside, and that instant invasion of the



enemy's territory should be adopted in its stead. It only remained to decide whether the advance should be made across the Sarre or across the Rhine.

The solution adopted was provisional. Should Austria mobilize immediately and send two corps, at peace strength, towards the frontiers of Saxony and Silesia the French army would concentrate round Strasburg, and, leaving merely a defensive screen along the Sarre, would operate on the Rhine. On the other hand, should Austria refuse to move, then the French plan would be reversed ; that is to say, the French army would concentrate round Metz, and the Vosges mountains being thinly held, the advance would be made across the Sarre. As late as July 15 Napoleon considered it unlikely that Austria would fail him, and resolved, therefore, to carry out his invasion across the Rhine.

It was recognized by the higher command in France that Germany could bring into the field over 500,000 men against 300,000 on the part of France. It was, however, considered feasible to neutralize this immense superiority by extreme rapidity of movement, and, to this end, Le Bœuf secured from the Emperor permission to introduce a modification in the process of mobilization. Briefly the plan was that mobilization, that is to say the raising of units from peace to war strength by the reception of reservists, horses, and equipment, should proceed simultaneously with the concentration of such units at their assigned positions in the theatre of war. In other words, units were to be rushed to the frontier, just as they stood, while the quota of men, horses, and material required to bring them to war strength was to be hurried after them.

Meanwhile all Europe was listening breathlessly for the rush of the invading French legions, and for the shouts of victory from a French army across the Rhine ; but week succeeded week, and the silence was still unbroken. A frightful chaos, incredible to those who first heard of it, resulted from Le Bœuf's well-meant effort. Mobilization broke down completely. No territorial system, such as characterized the Prussian military dislocation, existed in France ; with the result that a peasant residing near Bayonne might be summoned to join his unit in the Pas de

Calais, and, on arrival—thanks to the effort to effect concentration *pari passu* with mobilization—might find that his unit had entrained already for Alsace or Lorraine. There was a case of a reservist of the 4th Zouaves living in Lower Alsace who reported at Strasburg, was sent to Marseilles and thence to Northern Africa. A two days' march brought him to the depot of his unit, where he was equipped. Thence he was sent back to Marseilles, and from that city to Strasburg, where he found his regiment, after a journey of well over a thousand miles.

So far as the actual conveyance of troops was concerned, the French railway companies did marvels; and the first troop train started from Paris at 5.45 P.M. on July 16. Between that date and July 26 were despatched 594 troop trains, conveying 186,620 men, 32,410 horses, 3162 guns and road vehicles, and 995 wagon-loads of ammunition and supplies. In the nineteen days of the whole concentration period (July 16–August 4) the companies carried 300,000 men, 64,700 horses, 6600 guns and road vehicles, and 4400 wagon-loads of ammunition and supplies.

This activity on the part of the railway companies was, however, neutralized by the absence of adequate organization on the part of the military authorities, of which the following instance is typical. The first regiment to leave Paris, on July 16, arrived at the station at 2 P.M. to entrain at 5.45 P.M. The men had been accompanied through the streets by an immense crowd shouting *À Berlin!* and, with so much time to spare, they either blocked up the station or were taken off by their friends to the neighbouring taverns, where the consumption of liquor was such that, by the time the train started, most of the men were excessively drunk. In addition to this, many had been relieved of their ammunition—taken from them, perhaps, as “souvenirs” of an historic occasion. If, however, at the beginning, the troops got to the station three hours before there was any need, other occasions were to arise when they kept trains waiting three or four hours before they were ready to start.

Differing from the system in Germany, where the concentration of the troops took place at some safe point in the interior, while their transport was made thence by rail to

the frontier in complete units, *i.e.* as separate and distinct operations, the French system aimed at conducting the two movements simultaneously. This in itself was a prolific source of confusion and disorganization on the railways. The troops came to the stations on a peace footing, and in various strengths. One regiment might have only one-third the strength of another despatched earlier the same day or on the previous day, but the railway company would provide the same number of vehicles for both. There was thus a choice of evils as between removing two-thirds of the carriages (a procedure which time or the station arrangements did not always permit); sending the train away only partially loaded; or filling up the available space either with men belonging to other corps or with such supplies as might be available at the moment. Some trains did leave nearly empty, but it was the last mentioned of the three courses that was generally adopted. Men of different arms—infantry, cavalry, and artillery; mobilized troops, reservists, and individuals, separated, it might be, from their own officers, and not willing to show themselves amenable to the discipline of other officers—were thus transported at the same time as, possibly, a miscellaneous collection of horses, material, and commissariat supplies. Other trains, again, went away so overcrowded that they could not accommodate all the men who should have gone by them, many being left behind in consequence.<sup>1</sup>

Within a few days, therefore, the railways were full of tens of thousands of reservists, travelling to and fro fruitlessly seeking for their regiments. All the railway stations and all the restaurants in the larger towns were thronged, and the French War Office had to issue orders that the wandering reserves should be collected and forwarded to the nearest depot. At Marseilles the congestion was so serious that a divisional commander actually telegraphed to Paris to say that, having 9000 reservists whom nobody seemed to require, he intended shipping them off to Algiers to get rid of them.

In the confusion and haste which marked the French

<sup>1</sup> Edwin A. Pratt, *Rise of Rail Power in War and Conquest, 1833-1914*, chapter xii.



preparation, such reservists as did join their regiments were miserably equipped. Many of them were without mess-tins, water-bottles, or *tentes abris*. Regimental and corps transport were incomplete; they were deficient of horses, ambulances, supply columns, stretcher-bearers, veterinary surgeons, and administrative officers. A considerable part of the artillery harness proved to be useless; ammunition was not always available; large consignments of maps arrived, but they comprised only German territory—there were none whatever for the French frontier districts where they were first required; there were whole bodies of troops of whose whereabouts the Headquarters Staff were in complete ignorance; before a shot had been fired one corps was without coin to pay its troops; the fortresses, besides being unfinished and indifferently armed, were more than half empty; Metz had neither coffee, sugar, rice, brandy, nor oats. As early as July 26 the troops about that fortress were living on the reserve of biscuits. For 120,000 men there were only 38 additional bakers and these were woefully deficient of ovens. Strasburg was almost as badly off as Metz, while in Mézières and Sedan there was no biscuit nor preserved meat at all. At Châlons an immense number of wagons were stored in an enclosure with high, strong walls and only one gate; it took several days to get the vehicles out.

The agony of France in those unready days remains on record in the copies of the despairing telegrams still preserved. A senior commander telegraphed on the 27th, "*Je manque de biscuit pour marcher en avant.*" The 7th Corps could not even be assembled. The War Office telegraphed to the corps commander asking where were his divisions. A brigadier arriving at Belfort sent the following unique message, "Arrived at Belfort. Cannot find my brigade. Cannot find my divisional commander. Do not know where my regiments are. What shall I do?" When the corps commander arrived he found "neither tents, nor cooking pots, nor flannel belts, nor medical nor veterinary stores, nor hospital orderlies, nor medicines, nor forges, nor picketting gear. As for the magazines of Belfort—they were empty." This was the army which the Minister of War had declared was ready to the last gaiter-button, and of the France which

he described as *archiprêtre*. As Moltke put it : " Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the idea forced itself upon the French generals that, instead of entering Germany, they would have to defend themselves in their own country." The French did, indeed, score an initial success as referred to in the final paragraph of the previous chapter. But it was but a flash in the pan, as will soon be told.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE FRANCO - GERMAN WAR (*continued*) — THE GERMAN  
ADVANCE — SAARBRÜCKEN — WEISSENBURG — SPICHEREN  
— WOERTH

JULY 16 was the first day of mobilization for the North German, and July 17 for the South German troops. July 23 saw both begin to move westwards in mass towards the frontier, the North Germans by six and the South Germans by three railway lines. The same day, however, counter orders were issued changing the place of detrainment of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army from the Saar to the Rhine—an alteration which was to have considerable importance. The reason for this change in the programme was the move of the French towards the frontier at peace strength without waiting for the reservists to join, a fact which compelled Moltke to alter his original plan and to take precautions against a sudden invasion by temporarily superior forces.

So far as the mobilization of the German troops and their concentration on the frontier were concerned the plans worked, on the whole, remarkably well ; though even in this respect complete success was not attained. On the nine lines available, between July 24 and August 3 there were despatched 1200 trains, conveying 350,000 men, 87,000 horses, and 8400 guns or road vehicles. The delays which occurred to some of these trains were, however, sufficient to show that the machinery which had been elaborated was not working with perfect smoothness. On one route the troops were eleven hours late arriving, and then had their first warm food after a journey which had lasted twenty-one hours. For the journey to Homburg-in-der-Pfalz and Neunkirchen forty hours had been allowed, but although the first train did the journey on time, the next one was over two days late.



In the forwarding of supplies and provisioning the troops but little real advance on the campaign of 1866 was apparent, notwithstanding all the preparations which had been made in the meantime. No really adequate organization existed for regulating the transport of supplies to the front, and, although magazines had been set up, they were not in sufficient number nor always in the right place. The system, too, of operating them was defective. Just as in 1866 so in 1870 army officers, contractors, and railway companies, all inspired by zeal for the welfare of the troops, rushed off train-load after train-load of supplies to stations provided with an inadequate supply alike of sidings where the wagons could be accommodated, and of labour for the work of unloading. At the other end the example, already being set in France, of regarding loaded railway trucks as convenient movable magazines, which should not be unloaded until their contents were really wanted, often prevailed. Stringent action was required to check this system of locking up transport; but defective as the German arrangements in this respect were, the evil did not attain the same degree as in France.

To anticipate somewhat it may be said that serious difficulties were experienced on the German no less than on the French railways. After the concentration of the troops had been completed provisions and stores followed them in such volume that a hopeless block, extending to Cologne in one direction and Frankfort in the other, was speedily produced on the lines along the left bank of the Rhine, and the feeding of the troops was brought to a temporary standstill. The combined efforts of the authorities managed for a time to overcome the chaos and confusion thus brought about. Nevertheless, on September 5, there were standing, on five different lines, no fewer than 2322 loaded wagons, containing 16,830 tons of provisions for the II<sup>nd</sup> Army, or sufficient to keep it supplied for a period of twenty-six days. Such blocks on the German lines—though not always on so great a scale—were of frequent occurrence throughout the war.<sup>1</sup>

On the last day of July practically the whole of the

<sup>1</sup> Edwin A. Pratt, *op. cit.*, chapter x., *passim*.

German forces, divided into three armies, had concentrated on the Rhine and in the Palatinate beyond, and Moltke considered that the deployment was practically complete. On the right was the Ist Army, under General Steinmetz, consisting of two corps and a cavalry division in position at Treves, and echeloned along the roads leading to Wadern. The IIInd Army in the centre was round Mainz; it consisted of six corps and two cavalry divisions, and was commanded by Prince Frederick Charles. The IIIrd Army of the Crown Prince of Prussia included two Prussian corps, two Bavarian corps, and the Würtemberg and Baden divisions. The caution exercised in arresting the movement by rail on the banks of the Rhine and, in the case of the IIInd Army, in effecting the actual concentration near that river, brought it about that the invasion of France had to be deferred for a few days, and the advance beyond the Rhine took place in the form of a great crescent of which the Ist and IIIrd Armies formed the advanced points.

On the French side the Emperor entered Metz on July 28, and took command of the Army of the Rhine. Even in the physical condition of the commander-in-chief misfortune dogged the unfortunate French army. Napoleon III. was suffering from a most painful internal malady, which rendered it difficult for him to remain long in the saddle, and certainly unfitted him for the hardships of active campaigning.<sup>1</sup> When he joined the army on July 20, Napoleon III. found it spread over a front of 150 miles from Sierck (facing Treves) on the left, through St. Avold, Bitsch, and Hagenau to Colmar, and without a single army corps ready for action. Arranged by groups the French stood thus: the Metz group of the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and Guard Corps amounted to some 160,000 men. The Strasburg—Belfort group was about half that strength, and was made up from the 1st and 7th Corps. The reserve at Châlons (40,000) was not yet ready.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A surgeon was unostentatiously attached to the Emperor's personal staff with these significant written instructions: "L'Empereur a une rétention d'urine intermittente; alors il éprouve des angoisses inexprimables. Vous emporterez avec vous les instruments de sondage et même d'opération."

<sup>2</sup> 1st Corps	Marshal MacMahon	Strasburg.
2nd	„ General Frossard	St. Avold.
3rd	„ Marshal Bazaine	Metz.

This dispersion was, however, to be but of short duration. Napoleon, hoping against hope, still clung to the idea that Austria and Italy might any moment sign a treaty of alliance, and then five French corps <sup>1</sup> were to cross the Rhine at once, not actually at Strasburg—where the invading columns would find themselves confronted by the defiles of the Black Forest—but at Maxau. The primary objective of the invasion was the isolation of the armies of Southern Germany from those of the Confederation of the North, and the French army was to avoid, as far as possible, any serious engagement until Austrian mobilization was complete. By a skilful manoeuvre, the French were then to slip away and pass the Danube near Ulm so as eventually to reach Ratisbon; and, later, when the Austrian mobilization should be complete, the French army was to advance by Stuttgart in the direction of Bohemia, and hold out a hand to its ally. Junction was to take place at Nuremberg, and thence the two armies, reinforced by the Italian army coming by Munich, would enter Saxony and engage in *la grande bataille qui déciderait du sort de la guerre et des destinées de la Prusse*. Meanwhile the French fleet was to enter the Baltic, and by a demonstration immobilize a certain fraction of the Prussian army, while the General Reserve at Châlons was to deal with any strategic counterstroke which might menace Paris.

By the end of July this grandiose plan was clearly impracticable. There was still a dearth of any real information regarding the enemy, and the French generals had already begun to realize that the offensive, which had been the key-note of their plans, must be set aside, at any rate for the present. Public opinion was, however, making itself felt, and there was a vague feeling at French Headquarters that “something ought to be done.” The plan favoured was

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4th	Corps	General Ladmirault	Thionville.
5th	„	General Faily	Bitsch.
6th	„	Marshal Canrobert	Châlons.
7th	„	General Félix Douay	Belfort.
Guard	„	General Bourbaki	Nancy.
1st Cavalry	Division		Strasburg.
2nd	„	„	Lunéville.
3rd	„	„	Pont-à-Mousson.

<sup>1</sup> 1st, 7th, 5th, 2nd, 3rd Corps.



to make a reconnaissance in force towards Saarbrücken, but the scope of the operations, modest though they were—and insignificant indeed when compared with the dash into Southern Germany—dwindled down to a mere reconnaissance in force to be carried out by the 2nd Corps under General Frossard on August 2.

The town of Saarbrücken lies in the narrow valley of the Saar and was scarcely two and a half miles from the French frontier. A certain strategic importance pertained to the place in that it was a railway junction from which one line ran south-west to Metz and on the German side two lines went to Treves and the Rhine respectively. It was garrisoned merely by a small mixed force of three battalions, a few squadrons of Uhlans and a battery, and, as Moltke had as yet not considered it advisable to issue orders for the Ist and IInd Armies to advance, the defence of the town lay in the hands of these few outpost troops. The question of withdrawing the garrison had, indeed, been considered at German Headquarters, but the commander had begged to be allowed to remain at his post. Permission was given, and by the despatch of two battalions the strength of the garrison was brought up to that given above.

The detachment in Saarbrücken made a gallant defence but was naturally obliged to evacuate its position; the French success was in no way pushed and the 2nd Corps bivouacked on the heights overlooking the town. The losses had been slight, only eight on the German side being killed, and as a military operation the attack had been valueless. Its sole historical interest lies in the fact that it was here that the Prince Imperial had his first experience of war. With his father he had watched the engagement between an army corps under his former military tutor, General Frossard, and twelve companies of Prussians, and thus received his *baptême de feu*. The whole affair had lasted only from 11 A.M. in the morning until 2 P.M., and after it the Emperor, who was suffering anguish all day from his malady, returned by train to Metz, whither the great specialist Nelaton had been summoned from Paris. As the battle had been fought for political reasons, care was taken to give it importance, and the Parisian papers told of how

the Prussian battalions had been mown down by the terrible *mitrailleuse*. In Germany, too, the fact that the enemy had set foot on German soil, and that Prussian troops had fallen back, caused considerable excitement. Even at General Headquarters the operation could not be lightly set aside.

The first news of the French attack on Saarbrücken reached the Headquarters Staff not from the place itself, but from Frankfort, where an operator had received the news from his colleague on the frontier, and had transmitted it to Mainz. Even by midday on the 3rd Moltke was without exact intelligence, and was compelled to wire to the commandant at Saarlouis, "What happened yesterday at Saarbrücken? We have only rumours here and are without official information"—a curious state of affairs seeing that the French had severed neither the telegraphic nor the railway connection from Saarbrücken to Mainz. The insufficiency of information inclined Moltke to exaggerate the significance of the French operation, and during the evening of the 2nd he telegraphed to the commander of the IInd Army to say that the enemy were attacking Saargemund. In these circumstances Moltke wished Prince Frederick Charles to halt his leading columns and to allow the troops further in rear to close up. Not long afterwards the Ist Army was ordered to fill in to its left towards Tholey, the general idea being apparently that the Ist and IInd Armies should be prepared to act for the moment upon the defensive. There was, however, nothing in this prudent decision to imply that Moltke had for a moment contemplated renouncing his policy of offence as a whole. Three days earlier the Crown Prince had been ordered to advance at once, seek out the enemy and attack him, and this order still held good. Some delay was caused by closing up and concentrating the various corps, but by August 3 the Crown Prince had his army assembled in the neighbourhood of Landau with one division as advanced guard, three corps in front line, another one and a half corps in second line, and a cavalry division, unfortunately, in rear. During the evening he issued orders for an advance to the Lauter over which advanced guards were to be thrown.

By this time the French troops in Alsace had been put under Marshal MacMahon. They consisted of the 1st Corps

—of four divisions—at Strasburg and of the 7th nominally at Belfort, and were, as the map will show, widely separated from the bulk of the French army in Lorraine by the Vosges mountains. Orders had, therefore, been issued to MacMahon to close in towards Bitsch; and, to cover what really amounted to a flank march across the Crown Prince's front, MacMahon pushed out one division to the old fortified town of Weissenburg on the Lauter, where it arrived upon the evening of August 3. The next day the German IIIrd Army, in accordance with the Crown Prince's orders of the day before, made its advance to the Lauter, and the guns of the Bavarian advanced guard surprised the French in their bivouacs. The French flew to arms with characteristic fire, but, in face of the overwhelming superiority of numbers arrayed against them, they could effect nothing. After a gallant resistance, in which the French general was killed, the defenders fell back and made good their retreat to the neighbourhood of Woerth, unpursued by the Germans, whose cavalry had been delayed. There MacMahon assembled his own 1st Corps and the division of the 7th during August 5, and he had the promise of assistance from the 5th Corps at Bitsch some twelve miles away. Now that the enemy had taken the offensive before him, his intention was to accept battle on August 7 with the view of covering the Vosges and of securing ultimately a free passage across the mountains for a French offensive.

On the German side, after the Saarbrücken move had been analysed, Moltke had been developing his pieces with the underlying plan of mating the French army on August 9 on the Saar. His general idea was that, by that date, the Ist and IInd Armies could be on the line Saarlouis—Neu Hornbach with six corps in front and two more in second line, and should attack to their front while the IIIrd Army, wheeling to its right, should strike, simultaneously, a powerful blow against the French right flank. The plan bore some resemblance to that which achieved such striking success in Bohemia, namely the union of two wings upon the field of battle from points comparatively distant; and, indeed, Moltke writing to the Crown Prince's Chief of Staff during August 4 stated that the simultaneous intervention of the



three armies in the decisive battle was the end to be aimed at. The instructions, however, in view of the comparative insufficiency of information, were naturally expressed in very much more general terms than had been the case in 1866, and no geographical point of union was mentioned. And it may be pointed out that to ensure success for such a plan it was necessary that the Ist and IIInd Armies should check their forward march so as to allow the IIIrd Army to draw closer, and thus to be in a position to intervene simultaneously. This requirement, however, as will be seen, was not carried out.

To turn now to the French, the dislocation of their forces compelled the Emperor to form two separate armies. Marshal MacMahon received the chief command of the 1st, 5th, and 7th Corps and Marshal Bazaine of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Corps. The Imperial Guard remained under the special orders of the Emperor while, for the present, the 6th Corps, expected at Nancy, was not assigned to either army. Geographically the French forces—that is to say those opposite to the deployed German armies—were divided into two unequal groups with a connecting corps. The right group of five divisions with three brigades of cavalry was at Woerth. The left group of four corps was, roughly speaking, between Metz and the frontier in the area Spicheren—Boulay—St. Avold—Saargemund. The connecting corps—nominally at the disposal of the right group—was at Bitsch.

On the evening of August 5 General Frossard commanding the French 2nd Corps fell back from the immediate neighbourhood of Saarbrücken to the heights of Spicheren, a short distance in rear. German patrols brought in news of the retirement with the result that, on the 6th, the advanced guards of the Ist and IIInd Armies were hurried towards the Saarbrücken bridge, and the fiery disposition of Steinmetz, the Ist Army commander, induced him to cross the line of march of the IIInd Army on his left. The advance of the leading units of both the German armies was more in the nature of a vague forward movement than of anything systematic, and was not in harmony with Moltke's general plan. On emerging from Saarbrücken, and as they drew near the heights of Spicheren, they found French troops

there, but nothing betokened the presence of a powerful French corps with its fifteen batteries. Convinced that the enemy was in retreat and that only a rear guard was in front of him, the commander of the advanced guard of the leading division of the 1st Army decided to attack. At first the attackers were hopelessly outnumbered, but to use Moltke's words, "the magnetic talisman of the thunder of the guns brought up reinforcements—some promised, others unexpected." The struggle then grew into a battle which raged from noon till dusk. Although the French 3rd Corps was within supporting distance Frossard received no assistance, and, during the evening, hearing that his line of retreat was threatened, he fell back in fairly good order to Saargemund. Against Frossard's corps had been engaged portions of three army corps and two cavalry divisions, which formed the advanced troops of the German 1st and IIInd Armies. The French had, in all, some 24,000 infantry engaged, and this number was slightly exceeded by the Germans before the day closed.

The reverse suffered by the left group of the French by the enforced retirement of Frossard's corps from Spicheren was a serious blow, but it paled before the disaster suffered by the right group under MacMahon on the same day. That commander had drawn up his force on the hills about Woerth, almost on the spot where, in 1793, Hoche had overthrown the armies of the First Coalition, and occupied a strong defensive position on the high ground on the right bank of the Sauer. Three divisions of the 1st Corps were in front line with one in reserve. In rear of the right was a division of the 7th Corps, and a division of the 5th Corps was on the way to the field from Bitsch. Behind the right and centre were posted three cavalry brigades.

It was not the intention of the Crown Prince to attack upon the 6th, but the opposing outposts became engaged, and the impetuosity of the German corps and divisional commanders brought on a general engagement. The French fought with splendid bravery and offered a most determined resistance. But each hour brought additional German forces to the field, and MacMahon looked in vain for the expected reinforcements from his 5th Corps at Bitsch. On

both wings the French were eventually overlapped ; and in spite of a counter attack by 1500 Turcos in single line, and of the superb self-sacrifice of the French cuirassiers, the whole German force pressed forward in a gradually narrowing ring to the French centre at Fröschwiller, where a short and desperate resistance terminated the battle. Then late in the evening the beaten army broke and fled in wild disorder, covered for a time by a belated division from the 5th Corps. The retreat degenerated into a rout in the direction of Saverne and Lunéville, and MacMahon's force disappeared from the scene of warfare only to be reorganized as far back as Châlons.

The condition in which the fugitives arrived at Châlons can be gathered from the description of an eye-witness several days later :

Disorder reigned supreme in the camp. Instead of begilt generals there were commanders in dirty uniforms, who seemed afraid of showing themselves to their men. Instead of the fine regiments of other days there was a mass of beings without discipline, without cohesion, without rank—the swarm of dirty, unarmed soldiers known as the *isolés*. There, outside the tents and huts—there was no room for them inside—squatting or lying round the bivouac fires, without any regular order, without arms, and with their uniforms in shreds, were the *isolés* of MacMahon, the fugitives from Reichshofen, the remnants of regiments overwhelmed and dispersed by defeat ; soldiers of the line without rifles or pouches, Zouaves in drawers, Turcos without turbans, dragoons without helmets, hussars without sabretaches. It was an inert world, vegetating rather than living, and grumbling at being disturbed in its sleep of the weary.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Le Comte d'Hérissou, *Journal of a Staff Officer*, p. 18.



## CHAPTER XXV

THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—THE FRENCH RETREAT  
ON METZ—BAZAINE APPOINTED COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF—  
CONSIDERATIONS ON THE OPENING PHASE OF THE WAR

MOLTKE spoke no more than the truth when he wrote later in the Official History of the War: "The entirely unlooked for intelligence of a simultaneous defeat in Alsace and in Lorraine came like a thunderclap in sunshine upon the over-confident capital of France." At the same time Moltke must have felt that his own finely conceived strategical manœuvre had been blown to pieces. Nevertheless, there was consolation to be drawn from the reflection that it was to the very perfection of the Prussian military machine that the damage was due. The battle of Spicheren had been brought on by the doctrine of offence which permeated the Prussian army; it grew into a battle owing to the impetuosity with which every commander within sound of the guns hurried his units along and flung them into the fight; and it swelled into victory owing to the fine tactical abilities of the Prussian regimental officers, and to the physical and moral condition of the rank and file.

In his subsequent writings Moltke was at especial pains not to damp the offensive spirit, which he valued so highly, by any faint praise of the battle of Spicheren.

"It was conjectured," he wrote, "that the enemy *was retiring*. If we wished to hold him fast, or at any rate, not to lose touch with him, action was necessary."

And again,

It has been asserted that the battle of Spicheren should never have taken place where it did, as it frustrated plans on a larger

scale. It certainly had not been anticipated, but, generally speaking, a tactical victory rarely fails to coincide with a strategic policy. Success in battle has always been thankfully accepted, and turned to account. The battle of Spicheren prevented the 2nd French Corps from retiring unharmed; it brought the Germans in touch with the enemy's main force, and it gave the higher command a basis for fresh plans of action.<sup>1</sup>

The last sentence might be applied to any operation, successful or otherwise. But the meaning of the whole paragraph is clear—where any doubt exists the best policy is to push on and attack.

For some time German General Headquarters were but partly informed of the successes of the day. During the evening a telegram from Saarbrücken gave a bald statement of the victory near that town, and it was not until after midnight that a mutilated despatch gave tidings of the Crown Prince's success. Moltke, wakened up from sleep, and without his wig, sat up in bed, whilst staff officers, in their night-shirts, endeavoured to locate the probable position of the battle from the scanty data before them. It was necessary to telegraph to the Crown Prince to ask "Where was the battle and in what direction has the enemy retired?" Meanwhile, somewhat incorrect conclusions were drawn at Headquarters. Owing to the hurried retreat of the French armies all trace of them was for a time lost. It was assumed that MacMahon might have retreated towards Bitsch and that the French might make a stand between that small fortress and Saargemund; but it was also thought possible that the bulk of the left French group might have fallen back towards Metz, leaving MacMahon in the air, or, again, that it might endeavour to gather in MacMahon by a movement towards Saarebourg. Moltke, however, did not consider the situation sufficiently clear to warrant any departure from his general strategic plan, and although his action in not following up the success at Spicheren has been severely criticized, chiefly on the ground that the initiative was thereby to some extent abandoned, the safest course was

<sup>1</sup> See *German Official Account of the Franco-German War* (English Translation), p. 252; and Moltke's *Franco-German War* (English Translation), p. 34.

probably to delay and wait until the IIIrd Army had fulfilled its mission of crossing the Vosges. The three armies were then to make a simultaneous advance westward on a broad front, and within supporting distance of each other. This movement implied a wheel to the right and the Ist Army, as the pivot, had to halt ; the IInd Army was gradually to push troops to the southward ; and the IIIrd Army, marching as rapidly as possible, was to traverse the depths of the Vosges, and come up on the left of Prince Frederick Charles.

At French Headquarters divided counsel was the sequel to the misfortunes of Spicheren and Woerth. The Emperor fell a prey to the menace to Paris and dreamt only of abandoning Alsace, Lorraine, and Champagne, and of retiring in haste to Châlons to bar the way of the enemy to the capital. His Chief of the Staff, however, stood out for an immediate offensive, a policy which, in view of the fact that so far only about one-third of the French forces had been engaged, had much to recommend it, even in spite of the fact that MacMahon's force was for the moment in full retreat. Le Bœuf so far prevailed over his master as to induce him to start for the front in person, but at the last moment Napoleon abandoned the journey, though he directed Le Bœuf to proceed himself and confer with Bazaine upon the spot. The Emperor then returned to Metz, where he conferred with Le Bœuf's deputy, Lebrun, with the result that while the two marshals were discussing the possibilities of an offensive at St. Avold, Napoleon and the deputy chief of staff at Metz were actually issuing orders for a retreat to Châlons. On his return from St. Avold, Le Bœuf heard of the step decided upon in his absence and was so disconcerted that he began seriously to consider whether he should not blow out his brains.

For the moment, however, it was not the German armies which governed the French strategy, but the populace of Paris. During August 8 Napoleon received a message from the Empress imploring him not to return to Paris without having achieved a victory, and suggesting that he should hand over supreme command of the whole army to Marshal Bazaine. A message even more insistent was from Ollivier declaring that public opinion would not tolerate the abandon-



ment of Lorraine without a battle. The idea of retiring on Châlons was, therefore, renounced in favour of a concentration round Metz. The main body partially deployed on the French Nied, but hastily abandoned the position as untenable and continued its march westwards. Eventually, on August 13, the left wing, with a portion of the 6th Corps from Châlons, was assembled under the detached forts east of Metz—a total of 176,000 men and 540 guns.

By this time a change in the French higher command, pregnant with misfortune for France, had taken place. At half-past five on the afternoon of the 12th the Emperor had sent for Marshal Bazaine and informed him that he was henceforth to consider himself as Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Rhine. Bazaine demurred at the proposal, representing that MacMahon and Canrobert were senior to himself, but Canrobert, who was present, *se récria avec énergie*. The Emperor then insisted that opinion in the army had manifested itself clearly in favour of Bazaine, and closed the discussion with the words “ *c'est un ordre que je vous donne.* ”

With the sovereign on the German side exercising the functions of Commander-in-Chief merely in name, and the sovereign on the other formally abdicating his powers to a subordinate, the war, so far as the personal factor of the commanders *de facto* is concerned, becomes for the moment a contest between Moltke and Bazaine ; and the occasion is opportune to study the record of the marshal to whom Napoleon III. had confided the destinies of France, and whom public opinion both in the army, the capital, and the Chamber demanded as its saviour. François Achille Bazaine was born in February 13, 1811, and from his earliest years had displayed a marked enthusiasm for a military career, and just after his twentieth birthday enlisted in the 37th infantry of the line, from which he passed to the Foreign Legion in 1832, becoming a *sous lieutenant* in the following year. Two years later he passed for a time into the service of Spain and returned to France in 1837. Captain in the Foreign Legion in 1839, he became *chef de bataillon* of the 58th of the line in 1844. Meanwhile he had returned to Algiers, where he remained until 1854, and where he passed through all the grades up to general of brigade. In the Crimea Bazaine

commanded a division and led the expedition to Kinburn in 1855. During the Italian war of 1859 he distinguished himself at Melegnano, and in 1862 he embarked for Mexico at the head of the First Division of the Expeditionary Force, which was placed entirely under his command in the following year. On September 5, 1864, he reached the high honour of *Maréchal de France*, and on the termination of the ill-fated Mexican expedition he returned to France in 1867. There he received command of the 3rd Corps at Nancy and later of the Imperial Guard with which he was serving on the outbreak of war.

During his long career Bazaine had had considerable experience of war. In the first twenty years of his service he had taken part in a succession of campaigns in Northern Africa, in which he had frequently distinguished himself, while at the battle of Barbastro in the Carlist War of 1835, Bazaine, by an act of great personal gallantry, had rescued the body of his general when the latter was killed, a service which brought him the Order of Charles III. In the Crimea he served right through the campaign, and his record in Italy and Mexico has already been alluded to. Five times he had merited the distinction of a citation in divisional, garrison, and army orders for distinguished services; and in addition to the medals authorized for the campaigns in which he fought, Bazaine had received the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, the *Médaille Militaire*, and five foreign decorations, among which was the Companionship of the Bath.

The mere recital of the outstanding events in Bazaine's military career is easily made up from an inspection of official documents, but of his personal characteristics it is less easy to speak. The execration which, even to-day, greets the mention of the ill-starred marshal's name renders it a matter of no little difficulty to form an unbiassed judgment on the man. Even by his enemies it is admitted that he possessed intelligence, a subtleness of intellect, and bravery absolutely beyond question. But his finer qualities were dimmed by indecision, apathy, and a marked tendency to double dealing and intrigue. As compared with his rival of August 1870 it is perhaps not unjust to say that in experience of the practical

side of campaigning, Bazaine was, on the whole, at an advantage as compared with Moltke ; but in experience of directing a large army in the field and in the theoretical aspect of war, the situation was completely reversed : while as regards the moral qualities, without which mere professional experience and attainments are of little account, there was no comparison whatsoever.

At the moment when Bazaine was called upon to shoulder the immense responsibility of endeavouring to restore the shattered fortunes of France a lull had succeeded the storm which had raged along the frontier at Spicheren, Weissenburg, and Woerth ; and the magnitude of the task which confronted him will be more readily apparent if the moment is utilized to review the outstanding features of the struggle from the start. When the breakdown in the French mobilization had made itself apparent, and when the possibility of bursting across the Rhine was seen to be out of the question, it was natural that an attempt should have been made to bring the right group of MacMahon in close touch with the left ; but it is extremely doubtful whether the expedient of hurrying troops from Strasburg and southern Alsace towards Bitsch was justified in the circumstances. Such a measure was not far from an attempt to concentrate in the presence of the enemy, and it involved, as has been remarked earlier, practically a flank march across the front of the Crown Prince's army. A concentration of all the French forces behind the Vosges would probably have been the wisest course to presume. It is true that this would have implied the abandonment of Alsace, that such a course would have been fiercely resented by the Paris mob, and that the dynasty might not have survived the roar of disappointment which would have greeted the withdrawal. Nevertheless, although strategy and politics must go hand in hand, still, when a dangerous corner is reached, it is strategy which must be the guide. Napoleon III. was well acquainted with the theory of war, and had the practical experience of commanding a large army in the field. His personal bravery was beyond question ; and so high was his sense of duty that in spite of intense physical suffering he insisted upon being practically in the front line with his troops. Nevertheless,



it is true to say that it was dynastic interests rather than the interests of France which had guided him, and that when Bazaine took over command of the Army of the Rhine it was an army whose operations had been directed not by strategy but by politics.

And yet it was the inherent defects of the French army which prevented it, on August 6, triumphing over the handicap which a faulty distribution had imposed upon it. That army had great traditions, an immense and well-merited reputation, and the great experience of war garnered in Africa, Italy, and the Crimea. But a competent French critic <sup>1</sup> has shown the other side of the shield and has pointed out that an excessive centralization had for years eliminated initiative, warped all sense of responsibility, and hypnotized every one into a passive attitude of awaiting instructions. False doctrines had inoculated all ranks with the deadly virus of a belief in the superiority of the defensive over the offensive; and campaigns of a special kind, although they had turned out good soldiers and excellent regimental officers, had led to a striking neglect of the study of European war. On the fateful 6th of August the French had suffered two defeats, not on account of any outstanding skill on the part of the enemy, nor, certainly, on account of any fighting inferiority of the French regimental officers and rank and file. It was to the feebleness of the higher command that defeat in one case and disaster in the other were almost entirely due. Had Bazaine with his 3rd Corps effectively supported Frossard at Spicheren, and had de Failly at Bitsch gone to the assistance of MacMahon with all available troops of the 5th Corps, there is no reason why the battles of Spicheren and Woerth should not have ended in checks to the Germans. But the principle of marching to the sound of the guns and of rendering mutual support—even the principle of responding to urgent cries for assistance—had been overlooked by the French commanders, while they were the very essence of the spirit which animated their rivals.

Bazaine instead of helping Frossard is credited with the immortal phrase *le pion est dans la marmelade, qu'il y reste*;

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Picard, Chef de la Section Historique de l'État Major de l'Armée, 1911.

but, even without the assistance of the 3rd Corps, it is now accepted that Frossard should have held his own. As has been well said, "General Frossard, although he was not beaten, thought he was beaten, and therefore was beaten ; General Zastrow, though half beaten, refused to be beaten, and therefore was victorious."

In spite of the double defeat of August 6 the situation was not so desperate as to render it necessary to discard all plans except that of covering Paris, and to meditate a retirement as far back as Châlons for this end. Apart from the fact that such an extended retreat was not strategically necessary, there was the disadvantage that the *moral* of the French army would be profoundly depressed by such a movement, and the spirit of the enemy would be proportionately raised. Further, the movement was bound to exasperate the nation at large. Granted that, after August 6, retreat was necessary, there were several possible positions well to the east of Châlons, such as the French Nied, the Moselle, and Les Côtes de Meuse, where the French army could have re-formed and awaited attack. After August 6 Napoleon III. did indeed cause some inspired paragraphs to appear in the Paris Press to the effect that he proposed to await the enemy on the *positions inexpugnables* on the Moselle. This was the position which Prince Hohenlohe, in his memoirs, considered it likely that the French would make use of, holding the river line from Thionville to the neighbourhood of Nancy. For this, however, two factors were indispensable ; speed and concentration. As regards the first, the decision should have been arrived at not later than August 8 and should have been resolutely adhered to. What actually happened was that time was lost in deliberating over a counter-offensive which never matured, in orders and counter-orders for a retreat to Châlons, and in remaining uselessly for a short time upon the French Nied. And if it were seriously proposed to fight a great battle on the Moselle clearly every available battalion should have been united there. Napoleon, however, still persisted in assigning Châlons as the location of the 1st, 5th, and 7th Corps, and even proposed that Canrobert should take his 6th Corps back from there to Paris, where it might form the nucleus of a new

army. It was undoubtedly the political situation in the capital which prompted this breach of strategic principle.

In all the proposals and counter-proposals of French General Headquarters during the second week of August 1870 it will be remarked that there was the one dominant idea of interposing the French army between Paris and the Germans. The idea was a heritage of Napoleonic days, but the fact was overlooked that since 1814 Paris had become a *place forte* and the necessity of covering it directly had disappeared. In 1867 General Frossard had pointed out the advantages of a lateral retreat, and of manœuvring against the flanks of the invading army, and had assigned as the route to be taken Lunéville—Rambervillers—Épinal—Langres. An earlier variant had pointed to a diagonal retrograde movement towards Bayonne. There was, of course, nothing new in the idea of a lateral retreat, for Dumouriez had exploited it with success in 1792, Clausewitz had strongly recommended its employment against a circumspect adversary, and Moltke's partiality for the principle is well known.<sup>1</sup> Apart, too, from the advantage to be gained by operating against the invader's flank instead of merely resisting his advance, a lateral retreat would have secured for the French the whole of the centre and south of the country, whence their supplies were chiefly drawn, and in this case the retreat ought to have been directed not to the westward, but south-west in the general direction of Lunéville—Mirecourt—Langres. Such a line of action does not, however, appear even to have been considered in 1870. Here again it was the political factor which probably carried the day. The mob in Paris would have viewed with fury the apparent uncovering of the capital to the direct advance of the enemy, and it is probable that a political revolution would have entirely neutralized the strategic advantages to be looked for from a lateral retreat.

To turn now to the invaders, inasmuch as the French did not seize the initiative the carefully-worked-out German plans of mobilization and concentration proceeded undisturbed, although the II<sup>nd</sup> Army was, as a matter of precaution, kept back somewhat. When to this liberty to carry out

<sup>1</sup> See p. 87.



their deployment were added great numerical superiority, superior staff work, a higher conception of war, and the entire subordination of political to military ends, the frontier victories achieved by the invaders from the 4th to the 6th August were what might have been expected and call for no particular comment. After Woerth and Spicheren, however, when contact with the enemy had been gained and the enemy frontier had been crossed, the war takes on another and more interesting aspect.

A feature which will arrest the attention of the student of the war is the complete lull which succeeded the startling victories of August 6. After the battle of Woerth the first idea of Moltke was to cut off the retreat of MacMahon, who was assumed to be heading towards Bitsch and the upper Sarre. This conclusion was totally false, and was due primarily to the failure of the German cavalry. Similarly after Spicheren contact was entirely lost, and the Germans were left, not only in ignorance of the extent of their victory, but in expectation that the battle would be renewed upon the morrow, with the result that August 7 was a day of hesitation, at any rate for the Ist and IIInd Armies. On the following day these armies closed up, as if it were a question rather of resisting a French offensive than of exploiting a double victory ; and the enemy was in consequence given the opportunity of making his way unharried to the Moselle. It is true that Moltke's general plan of wheeling his three armies to the right, pivoting on the Ist, would have been disorganized by an immediate and rapid advance of the Ist and IIInd, but probably it is equally true that his aversion from a change of plan was due to the lack of information on which to base a variant. Immediately after 1870 a good deal of ink was spilled in picturesque narrative of ubiquitous Uhlans dotted over every hilltop, overlooking the French bivouacs, and keeping German Headquarters informed of every movement of the enemy. The real fact, however, is that, just as the strategical employment of cavalry had been a failure in 1866, so its handling was equally weak in 1870 in the earlier stages of the war.

The German secret service was good, and the numerous prisoners captured afforded valuable information ; neverthe-

less, it was on the service of exploration by cavalry that Moltke necessarily had chiefly to rely. This service, as has just been said, had been defective in 1866, and the utilization to the best effect of a large body of cavalry had not been thoroughly understood. The bulk of the available mounted troops had been, as a rule, collected into large masses which were kept in the rear of the fighting troops, with the result that contact with the enemy was frequently lost. This defect had not escaped Moltke, and after the Seven Weeks' War he busied himself in the study of Napoleon's campaigns with the view of gaining a deeper insight into the strategic employment of mounted troops. As a result of his investigations he laid down his views in a monograph<sup>1</sup> in which he deprecated the undue employment of heavy cavalry, pointing out that shock action must, through lack of opportunity, be regarded as a task secondary to that of exploration, and recommended the employment of light brigades or divisions to act as the eyes and ears of the army, while concealing the movements of their own troops.

Almost up to the outbreak of the Franco-German War the intention had been to retain the bulk of the cavalry, thus reorganized, in one great mass to be employed as strategic cavalry under the Commander-in-Chief's own hand, and in a Memorandum drawn up at Berlin as late as May 6, 1870, Moltke had laid down that the concentration of the German armies should be covered by a strategic advanced guard particularly strong in cavalry, and had gone so far as to name the units to form it in detail. These were to have formed a cavalry corps, composed of the 3rd, 4th, 10th and Guard Cavalry Divisions, some 76 squadrons in all, under a specially selected commander, and supported by an infantry division moving a day's march in rear. Such a strategic advanced guard would, it was hoped, be strong enough to gain sufficient information of the enemy, and to secure twenty-four hours at least for the necessary dispositions to be made by the main body in rear. The proposal to have one large mass of cavalry was, however, set aside, and a distribution of the mounted troops between the three armies took place. The services of information and protection

<sup>1</sup> *Über Verwendung der Kavallerie nach der Erfahrungen von 1866.*

were thus decentralized. Unquestionably this reacted on the security of the army as a whole. *Direction stratégique éclairée* was lacking; the opening of the campaign was marked by battles in which the Germans stumbled against their opponents; and it was due largely to the tactical initiative and efficiency of the subordinate commanders that the handicap of lack of information was got over. The dangers of such a system are undoubtedly great and obvious. Tactically, the attacking force may find itself committed to a battle with an enemy very superior in numbers; while, from the point of view of strategy, the Commander-in-Chief may find that a battle may be brought on neither when nor where nor as he intended it to be fought. Nevertheless the distribution of the mounted troops was still further extended, and on August 8, by Moltke's orders, cavalry was assigned to each corps of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army, so that, just as the strategic cavalry of the army as a whole had given place to separate cavalry formations for each of three component armies, these formations were now replaced by mounted contingents—sometimes merely a brigade—assigned to individual corps.

This watering down of the service of security has been very severely commented on by critics of the war, but it is a question whether Moltke is not entitled to high praise for departing from a principle unsuitable for his strategic plans. The strategic massing of cavalry, admirably adapted for a strategic advance guard to a main body following as a mass of manoeuvre, was not equally suitable for a rapid advance on a broad front with envelopment as the aim. The services of information and protection need in this case to be distributed, and Moltke had the strength of mind to adopt a method which appeared to be the logical sequel of his general strategic plan. That the service of information proved at first to be defective is undoubtedly true; but this seems due less to the distribution prescribed by Moltke than to the manner in which the army commanders handled such cavalry as was allotted to them.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—OPENING OF THE BATTLE ROYAL OF METZ

ON August 11 German General Headquarters had reached St. Avold, and during the afternoon Moltke issued an order to the effect that apparently the French were in the act of retiring through Metz over the Moselle, and the German armies were directed to move, generally speaking, as follows: the Ist Army towards Metz, the IIInd on Pont-à-Mousson, while the IIIrd Army was to continue its march towards the line Nancy—Lunéville. During the following day, however, touch with the enemy, which had been almost lost since the 7th, was once more closely resumed by the cavalry of the German Ist Army, and the question now to be answered was what inferences should be drawn from the enemy's "very peculiar proceedings" which had been observed.

Contrary to what had hitherto been supposed, it now seemed that the French had not completely retired across the Moselle. This, however, was not wholly unwelcome news to Moltke. At the same time a certain amount of difficulty in the situation could not be disguised. The Ist Army must now be halted for the moment within immediate reach of the enemy, and a passage of the Moselle by the IIInd Army would involve a separation of force. Further, inasmuch as the French might be still in considerable force east of Metz, the right of the IIInd Army would require to be held back to assist the Ist in case of need; and in these circumstances Moltke issued an order from the new headquarters at Herny at 9 o'clock on the night of the 13th, to the following effect:—

1. Considerable hostile forces were still east of Metz.
2. The Ist Army was to remain in position on the French Nied during the 14th and *observe* whether the French were about to retire or attack.
3. The IInd Army was to keep the IIIrd and IXth Corps ready to assist the Ist Army. The remaining corps were to continue their advance to the sector of the Moselle Marbaché—Pont-à-Mousson. The Xth Corps was to take up a position on the left bank.
4. The cavalry of *both* the Ist and IInd Armies was to *push forward as far as possible* and molest any retreat of the enemy along the Metz—Verdun road.

These instructions had been anticipated by Prince Frederick Charles, who had acted on his own initiative after receiving the reports of his cavalry. On the 12th he had decided to push forward an advanced guard to the Moselle, so as to forestall the French, who had committed the error of leaving the bridges unguarded. Further, the Prince had directed that his 5th Cavalry Division should cross the river and gain the plateau between the Moselle and the Meuse, and should from there make for the Metz—Verdun road and ascertain definitely whether or no the enemy was retiring from Metz.

On the French side, the sole possibility of Bazaine proving himself the saviour of France lay in his having a free hand. This boon, however, was denied him, for the Emperor, although he had transferred the responsibility of command to the marshal's shoulders, remained in Metz, and still exercised an unfortunate, if vague, control of affairs. During the evening of the 12th he wrote to Bazaine :

The more I think of the position of the army the more critical I find it, for if a part of it is forced back and a retirement in disorder should ensue, the forts cannot prevent the most frightful confusion. See what can be done, and if we are not attacked to-morrow *prenez une résolution*.

The resolution was apparently taken at midday on the 13th—that is to say, if concurrence in a plan of Napoleon III. can be so described. Bazaine had an interview with his sovereign at the prefecture of Metz about noon, and this time retreat was definitely resolved on. During the after-

noon the Emperor, suspecting probably that his successor's heart was not in the plan resolved on, sent him two pressing notes urging upon him the supreme necessity of falling back over the Moselle without delay. Bazaine, however, had been meanwhile considering whether it would not be better to remain upon the right bank, either to fight a defensive battle, or even to undertake a general offensive. The project, as a matter of fact, came to nothing, but the fact that it was formed shows that Bazaine, in retreating over the Moselle, was possibly committed to a line of conduct for which he had a distaste. However this may be, during the evening orders were issued for the retreat. But so feeble was the staff work of the French that no indication of the hour at which the operation was to begin, no precise directions as to the composition of the various columns, and no real instructions for protection were included.

At about half-past four on the morning of August 14 the French troops were under arms, but it was not until nearly noon that they began their retreat from both flanks, under cover of the 3rd Corps, which was deployed in two lines on the Borny plateau, behind the deep valley of the Colombey brook. The nature of the French operation was divined by a brigade commander in the German Ist Corps, who was commanding an advanced guard, and he attacked about 4 in the afternoon. The retreating column immediately faced about and the affair developed into a battle which lasted until darkness came on, and in which five Prussian brigades and four divisions of the French became engaged. Both sides claimed the victory, but tactically it was a drawn fight, inasmuch as the Germans did not drive the French from their main position, nor did the French with their superior forces overwhelm the German advanced guard.

In reviewing the opening phase of the Battle Royal of Metz it is clear that for some days Moltke had been acting on a false hypothesis. He had been obsessed with the idea that the French would fall back over the Moselle, and this hypothesis is crystallized in his orders issued from St. Avold on the afternoon of August 11. When later it was reported on trustworthy information that the enemy had fallen back to Metz, but no farther,



this decision on the enemy's part was, in the words of the German Official Account, "contrary to what was hitherto supposed," and this statement has drawn from Marshal Foch the somewhat sardonic footnote, *Live : contrairement à l'hypothèse de Moltke qui a vu la masse principale des Français se retirant sur Metz au delà de la Moselle*.<sup>1</sup> Moltke, it is true, has placed on record the statement that the stand made by the French east of the Moselle was actually an advantage for the furtherance of his plans; but in this case, the need of pinning the French on the right bank of the Moselle was imperative in view of the fact that an advance by a portion of the IInd Army across the Moselle, south of Metz, involved a dangerous division of force. The danger of the situation is clear when it is borne in mind that on August 13, the German IIIrd Army, on the line generally Dieuze—Avricourt, was two days' march from the Moselle, and immediate operations were thus confined to the troops under Bazaine's orders on the one hand, and the German Ist and IInd Armies on the other. In cavalry the forces were about equally matched, while in infantry the Germans had 20 divisions to about 16½ of the French. Bazaine, however, had the great advantage conferred by the double *tête du pont* formed by the fortress of Metz, and the consequent advantage of being able to operate on either bank at will.

In these circumstances it was clearly advisable that Moltke should have held as many French troops as possible pinned to the eastern outskirts of Metz, and thus have prevented Bazaine from being free to use his advantage of situation. Moltke's categorical orders to the commander of the Ist Army on the 13th were, however, but to *observe* the enemy, a course of action which afforded Bazaine full liberty either to harass the IInd Army, or to escape, whichever he chose; and the order was one particularly unfortunate to issue to a commander of the fiery and impetuous temperament of Steinmetz. The commander of the Ist Army had, earlier in the campaign, complained to the King of the manner in which Moltke had relegated him to a secondary position; and now, like Achilles, he sulked in his quarters, and found a morose satisfaction in carrying out his instruc-

<sup>1</sup> *De la conduite de la guerre*, p. 266.

tions of passivity to the letter. The method by which Moltke dealt with the situation on August 12 and 13 does, in this respect, seem to call for some comment, and it has been very severely criticized by Marshal Foch.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, although there is no critic whose analysis deserves more attention than that of the French generalissimo, it is but fair to Moltke to lay stress upon certain points. In the first place, Marshal Foch and Moltke belong to two national and entirely different strategic schools. The German school favours the strategic advance on a broad front, with but a small general reserve, and with the aim of envelopment constantly kept in view. With the French school, on the other hand, the underlying feature is the employment of a strong strategic advanced guard, behind which is the great mass of manœuvre ready to swing into position, to deal with the situation revealed by the protective body in front. Put crudely, the German system is to deal with situations as they arise, relying on outflanking effect to neutralize difficulties brought about by sudden developments ; while the French system aims at keeping as much as possible in hand until the situation is somewhat clarified. The strong advanced guard, or the absence of it, is thus the feature which clearly distinguishes one system from the other ; and throughout all his criticism on Moltke's strategy, the absence of such a body on the German side is again and again unfavourably commented upon by Marshal Foch. In a solution of the problem which confronted Moltke on August 13 the French critic takes as an axiom the necessity of *la protection d'une forte avant-garde*, and proceeds to work out the problem on orthodox Napoleonic lines. Where, however, the two strategic schools are so divergent in their theories it is difficult for a disciple of one of them to exchange the rôle of advocate for that of judge ; and, thus, although the reasoning of Marshal Foch merits profound attention, it does not necessarily induce conviction. Each system is, after all, but a compromise, and had both been tried in 1870 the question of their relative superiority might have been decided for good. Unfortunately, however, for the enrichment of military science, while Moltke acted

<sup>1</sup> *De la conduite de la guerre*, pp. 270-77.

on a system, even an undeveloped one, Bazaine acted on practically no system at all.

As regards the battle of Borny its main interest lies in the fact that, like the earlier battles of the war, it was brought on by a disregard of the expressed wishes of higher authority. But, true to his determination not to express any opinion likely to discourage the qualities of initiative and offensive spirit, Moltke, in the Official Account, although he dwelt upon the dangers of such improvised attacks, nevertheless extolled this particular instance, pointing out that it so delayed the retreat of the French as to render possible the subsequent envelopment of the French army. Marshal Foch puts the matter much more bluntly by asserting plainly that, had not Moltke's hand been forced by the impetuosity of his subordinates in bringing on the battle of Borny, Mars-la-Tour would have ended differently, and Gravelotte would never have been fought at all. The action of the Prussian brigadier von der Goltz in bringing on an action on his own responsibility has, indeed, been described by the Marshal as "the salvation of Moltke's strategy," but by other critics the view is held that the delay in deciding definitely upon the retreat from Metz, and the ineptitude of the French staff arrangements for it, were *per se* sufficient to spell the doom of the Army of the Rhine.

Strange as it may seem—in view of the strategic importance of Metz and Verdun—no direct line of railway united the two fortresses in 1870. Communication by rail from Metz was by two alternative routes, each involving an immense detour, and each with its initial stage exposed to an enemy near the Moselle. It is possible that this comparative isolation of Metz may have led the lethargic mind of Bazaine to magnify the difficulties of quitting that fortress and of making his way to Verdun. At any rate it is clear that the fulfilment of the orders of Napoleon III. would have been much simplified had a railway been in existence, always provided that Bazaine *prit une résolution* in time.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—MARS-LA-TOUR

ALL through the night of August 14 and 15 the wearied French divisions, which had either been engaged in the battle of Borny or had been standing under arms, filed over the Moselle, and the Emperor took up his quarters at Longeville outside the town. Marshal Bazaine's orders, dated the 13th, prescribed that the whole army was to march upon one road as far as Gravelotte, whence one portion was to continue by Mars-la-Tour, while the other was to bear to the right and march by Conflans. On the southern road De Forton's cavalry division was to precede the 2nd, 6th, and Guard Corps, while on the Conflans road Du Barrail's cavalry division was to lead the way, followed by the 3rd and 4th Corps. The northern *chaussée* through Briey was not used owing to a false impression that the Germans were crossing the Moselle north of Metz. Considerable confusion reigned all day in the streets of the fortress and along the main road to Gravelotte, owing to the mass of transport, which became seriously congested, causing frequent checks and delay. Thus by evening the cavalry divisions had got no farther than Vionville and Doncourt respectively, and on both the roads German cavalry had been met.

On the other side of the Moselle German cavalry had ridden forward during the morning to the outworks of Metz, but found no signs of the enemy, and, later, King William rode over from his Headquarters at Herny to the 1st Army. Immense clouds of dust were now seen rising beyond the fortress, and it could be no longer doubted that the French were in retreat, and that the II<sup>nd</sup> Army was now free to cross the Moselle with all its transport. Orders were sent to it to

pursue along the Metz—Verdun road, and by the evening of the 15th the position of the German forces was as follows : the Ist Army was still on the right bank, but two of its corps were under orders to be prepared to cross south of Metz ; of the IIInd Army, the IIIrd Corps and the bulk of the Xth had crossed the Moselle at Novéant and Pont-à-Mousson. Farther south the Guard Corps with its cavalry division was over the river at Dieulouard, and to the south of that again the IVth Corps had seized the crossing at Marbache, while the remaining three corps (the IIInd, IXth, and XIIth) were in rear east of the river. Far out in front was practically the whole of the 5th Cavalry Division, thirty-four squadrons, either close to or astride the Metz—Verdun road at Mars-la-Tour.<sup>1</sup> The Crown Prince's IIIrd Army was on the line generally Lunéville—Bayon.

Thus was brought about the most remarkable battle of the war—that of Mars-la-Tour, fought on August 16. During the morning of that day the commander of the Xth Corps reinforced the 5th Cavalry Division with two batteries of horse artillery, and directed it to make a reconnaissance in force. Similar instructions were given by the commander of the IIIrd Corps to the 6th Cavalry Division, which advanced over the plateau above Gorze. In each case the infantry and artillery of the corps were pushed forward as rapidly as possible. Opposed to this activity was now a sluggish enemy. The brave but unfortunate Emperor had realized that his presence with the French army was a positive hindrance to its chances of success, and at 4 A.M. he took leave of Bazaine, driving off immediately afterwards to Verdun by the Conflans—Étain road, escorted by a brigade of cavalry. The release from the shackles of higher authority had, however, no beneficial effect on Bazaine's movements, for about 5 A.M. he made up his mind to put off the prosecution of the retirement of the army to Verdun until the afternoon, so as to give time for the 3rd and 4th Corps to disentangle themselves from the confusion in and round Metz. Meanwhile only the most elementary precautions were taken

<sup>1</sup> German Official Account, vol. i. p. 348. English Translation. The number of squadrons is incorrectly given by Moltke as 24 in his *Franco-German War*.

towards acquiring information as to the enemy's situation and movements, and permission was actually given for the French soldiers to pitch their *tentes abris*.

The German 5th Cavalry Division soon received information from the outposts that just west of Vionville was a large camp of French cavalry, quite unprotected, in which cooking was going on. This was Forton's Cavalry Division, to which, amazing as it may seem in view of the fact that it had been engaged with hostile cavalry the day before, the order had been given to unsaddle and water. The German guns opening fire at 9.15 A.M. upon such an unusual target produced considerable confusion, the French cavalry flying in wild disorder until they rallied behind the infantry bivouacs at Rezonville. Meanwhile a brigade of the German 6th Cavalry Division had reached the heights north of Gorze, and drove in the lines of French skirmishers opposed to them. The guns had opened fire at almost the exact moment when those with the 5th Cavalry Division came into action, and this circumstance, exaggerated by the bewildered French into a great arc of fire, produced a considerable moral effect. Thus by 10 o'clock the German cavalry extended along a wide arc from the Bois d'Arnould to the Tronville heights, while against this force the French 2nd Corps advanced to the attack from the neighbourhood of Rezonville. Just about this hour there appeared, at the extremities of the great arc formed by the cavalry, the advanced guards of the 5th and 6th Divisions of the German IIIrd Corps. These columns, separated from each other by more than two miles, were exposed to a serious risk of being beaten in detail before assistance could be rendered. Nevertheless, there was no question of holding back the divisions until support should be forthcoming. They were quickly thrown into the fight, and by noon the German IIIrd Corps held the line Vionville—Flavigny—Bois d'Arnould. The vigour and audacity of the attack by the 5th Division on the German right exercised a capital influence in persuading Bazaine that the enemy was endeavouring to cut him off from Metz, for the Marshal was induced to group on his left considerable forces which were urgently required on his right wing.



The French 2nd Corps, which had so far borne the brunt of the fighting, fell back towards Rezonville, and, to reanimate the retiring troops, the French Cuirassiers of the Guard were directed to charge the advancing Germans. But, checked in their career and then thrown into confusion by baggage waggons and camp equipment strewn on the ground, the regiment suffered severely, and its remnants escaped with difficulty. Thus the morning wore away in an attempt by a weak German force to hold back the ever-increasing numbers of the French ; by 2 o'clock the crisis of the battle had arrived, and before the afternoon was far spent the situation was undoubtedly grave. The Germans, exhausted after their strenuous efforts of the morning, were fought to a standstill ; their ammunition had almost run out ; and there was not a single battalion in reserve. The French had been gradually extending their right, and it was evident that an attack by the whole of the 6th Corps towards Vionville was about to be made. The nearest support for the Germans, a single division of the Xth Corps, was still miles away. It was of absolutely essential importance that the French attack should be delayed unless the Germans were to be crushed out of hand by superior force.

Alvensleben saw that the hour had come. Near Vionville stood six squadrons of von Bredow's brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division. In order to relieve the pressure on the infantry of the German left, it was of primary importance to silence the French batteries on the Roman road. Orders were sent to von Bredow to attack, and that commander saw at a glance that the day could only be restored by a charge pushed right home, in which the cavalry must sacrifice itself. Taking advantage of a depression of the ground, von Bredow led his squadrons north from Vionville, and then forming line, facing east, dashed forward under an overwhelming artillery and infantry fire. The first French line was ridden over and the German squadrons, charging through the guns, sabred the teams and gunners. Farther to the rear the French batteries limbered up and galloped off the field. After a career of over 3000 yards von Bredow ordered the recall to be sounded, but, thinned by the enemy's bullets and hemmed in by hostile cavalry, only the remnants rallied near

Flavigny. The six squadrons—in all under 800 strong—had lost 16 officers, 363 other ranks, and over 400 horses, but the losses had not been suffered in vain. Time had been gained; the advance of the French 6th Corps was checked; and the terrible pressure on the Prussian left was eased.

Now, however, about 3 P.M. a fresh danger threatened the exhausted Germans. With the arrival of their 3rd and 4th Corps the French right pressed forward, and four divisions advanced towards the Tronville copses. The woods were vigorously contested, but the weak left of the IIIrd Corps was forced back on Tronville village. But meanwhile, true to the principle of marching to the sound of the guns, the Xth Corps was hurrying from Thiaucourt to the battlefield, and Prince Frederick Charles, arriving on the scene from his Headquarters at Pont-à-Mousson about 4 P.M., announced his intention of taking the offensive with his left wing, where the arrival of the bulk of that corps was momentarily expected. For the time, therefore, the Prussian artillery bore the brunt of the fighting until the leading troops of the Xth Corps regained the Tronville copses. The French, however, had still troops in hand and their right gradually extended to the sunken valley west of Bruville, and thus when the 38th Brigade of the Xth Corps advanced to the attack north of Mars-la-Tour it found itself confronted by a strong French line. A deep ravine in front of the French position was successfully crossed, but before they reached the opposite bank the attackers were met by a storm of bullets from the French infantry, and driven back with a loss of nearly all the officers and more than fifty per cent of the rank and file. The French pressed after the defeated enemy, but were checked right and left by charges of Prussian cavalry. Here in this quarter of the field, to which the centre of gravity of the struggle had now shifted, the culminating point of the battle was reached in a great cavalry *mêlée* on the upland of Ville-sur-Yron. At about 3.30 P.M. General Rheinbaben, commanding the 5th Cavalry Division, had received orders to envelop the French right, but it was not until an hour later that the leading units advanced from Puxieux on Mars-la-Tour. The French on their side had collected the bulk of three cavalry divisions

near Bruville, and at about a quarter to seven the opposing masses were locked in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle which proved to be the greatest cavalry engagement of the war, nearly 6000 horsemen taking part in it. Gradually the French were forced back towards Bruville ; and the Prussian horse re-formed on the contested plain and then slowly retired on Mars-la-Tour.

From his position near Flavigny Prince Frederick Charles had eagerly watched the development of the battle, and when about 7 P.M. the firing became more intense on the right and reports gave reason to expect reinforcements on that flank, he determined to deliver a general attack. The movement was attempted, but the Xth Corps after its forced march was incapable of further exertions, and the artillery of the IIIrd Corps was at once stopped by the guns and rifle fire of the French Imperial Guard. Some desultory fighting continued, but by 9 o'clock the battle had everywhere died away, and a profound silence reigned over the whole field.

Thus ended a battle glorious for the German arms, and one well meriting the epithet "decisive." It was not decisive in the sense used by Hallam, by which a decisive battle is one to which a different result would have materially altered the history of the world ; and in this respect Mars-la-Tour cannot challenge comparison with Châlons, or Hastings, or Valmy, or the Marne. Nor was it decisive in the dramatic sense of Sedan, for there were few guns or prisoners or trophies to show, and both armies, wearied by a twelve-hour struggle, bivouacked opposite one another, doubtful of what the morning would bring forth. But in the limited signification of the term as equivalent to "of such effect as to lead directly to an early conclusion of the war," *decisive* is a fit epithet for the contest of August 16. By a bold employment of their numerically inferior forces, the invaders had stopped the French retreat and given time for their main body to interpose between the forces of MacMahon and Bazaine. Mars-la-Tour showed, above all, the triumph of attack—attack persistent, vigorous, and unflinching, even against great odds. To the bulk of the Army of the Rhine had been opposed merely the IIIrd and Xth Corps,



with two cavalry divisions, and fractions of the VIIIth and IXth, and the numbers actually engaged may be roughly estimated at 60,000 Germans to 120,000 French. A further interest is to be found in the very ambiguity of the result. Tactically it was a drawn battle. Each side had suffered the same losses as the other, some 16,000 of all ranks. Each side, indeed, claimed the victory; the French because they withstood the attempts of the Prussians to dislodge them from their main positions; the Prussians because the enemy had not been able to recover the ground lost by him in the forenoon, nor to continue his retreat. But the day cannot be judged merely by its tactical results. The true strategic import of the battle gave the lie to any French claim of victory, and even to the lesser contention that the fight was drawn.

A still further interest is lent by the conditions in which the battle was brought about. Here was no formal attack against an enemy located more or less accurately as holding a defensive position and awaiting the onslaught. On the contrary, Mars-la-Tour was an encounter battle in the strictest sense of the term, a class of contest giving the fullest scope for initiative, rapid deduction, and enterprise on the attacking side. Then the battle-field itself was a lesson of the use which may be made of ground. From Novéant and Pont-à-Mousson the ravines trending down to the valley of the Moselle formed covered ways for the advance of the columns of the Prussian right, while on the left the plateau land afforded scope for manœuvre—factors which were recognized and exploited by the attackers to the full. Again, it was in the fullest sense a battle of the three arms, and not least of cavalry. Eight cavalry charges took place, and cavalry throughout the day charged infantry, guns in action and opposing cavalry. The battle was, indeed, marked by the greatest cavalry contest of the war, a combat which has never since been equalled, and is little likely, in the conditions of present-day warfare, to find a rival. Finally, the proximity of the great fortress of Metz, with the possibilities it afforded the French for use as a pivot of manœuvre, gives to the problem of Mars-la-Tour a particular interest of its own.

Such a battle, with such a great strategic result, shows clearly that the passage of the Moselle by German forces on August 15 was, without any doubt, the decisive incident of the Franco-German war. Of late years the operation has been subjected to minute analysis by the most competent critics in Europe. Briefly, it may be stated that the higher French criticism of to-day alleges that while Moltke and Prince Frederick Charles made different deductions there was this similarity between the two, that both deductions were wrong. And, further, the corollary is insisted on, to use a homely phrase, that it was more by luck than good management that the Germans avoided defeat.

To take the case of Prince Frederick Charles first. On the 13th he had found the bridge at Pont-à-Mousson intact, and had immediately drawn the conclusion that the French did not intend to fight a battle near Metz; it seemed highly probable that the enemy Higher Command would use every effort to place the French army intact, and as quickly as possible, behind the Meuse. Prince Frederick Charles immediately determined to endeavour to secure the passages over that river before the enemy. In a word, he proposed to race the French by marching parallel to, and, if possible, faster than his opponents. During the forenoon of the 15th, therefore, he telegraphed to Moltke asking for permission to bring all his army over the Moselle. This message was crossed by one from the Chief of the Staff, in which it was stated that it was probable that the French were in full retreat towards Verdun. This squared with the hypothesis already made by the Prince, and the only doubtful point now was what start had the French got. Even, however, if they had got so long a start as to make it impossible to head them off from the Meuse, they could be harried from behind. And, to cut a long story short, at 7 in the evening orders were issued to the IIInd Army of which the following was the gist :

*The French are retreating towards the Meuse.*

*The IIInd Army will pursue at once towards that river.*

*The IIIrd Corps is to reach to-morrow the Metz—Verdun road*  
a Mars-la-Tour and Vionville.

*The 6th Cavalry Division will make the same road via Thiaucourt.*

*The Xth Corps to St. Hilaire—Maizcray line. Guard Corps—*Advanced guard to Rambucourt. Main body to Bernécourt.

*The XIIth, IVth, IXth, IInd Corps, on the right bank, to* approach the Moselle.

*The 5th, 12th (Saxon), and Guard Cavalry Divisions* are to reconnoitre the crossings of the Meuse from Dieue-sur-Meuse to Commercy.

It will be seen that at the close of the 15th Prince Frederick Charles still adhered to his deduction that the French were retreating to the Meuse, but the information from his cavalry by no means warranted such a hypothesis. Late in the afternoon he had received a message from the commander of the 5th Cavalry Division dated Tronville, 1 P.M., to say that his cavalry and artillery had been engaged with the like arms of the enemy, and that the latter had fallen back *towards Metz*. From this, and from other messages arriving about the same time, it was clear that there were no enemy columns west of Tronville, and that such of the enemy as had been seen east of that village were retiring eastwards, in other words, in exactly the opposite direction to the Meuse. In these circumstances, Prince Frederick Charles has been severely criticized for his obstinate adherence to a hypothesis which was not based on information, but on the other hand it must be pointed out that the information he received as to French troops having been encountered on the Gravelotte—Conflans—Etain road was sufficient to warrant the belief that possibly a great retreat was being conducted by that route.

Like his subordinate, Moltke was throughout the 15th convinced that the French were retreating, and his orders issued in the forenoon, at midday and at about half-past six in the evening, testify to his determination to give his enemy no respite. In the first of these communications he impresses upon Prince Frederick Charles that "pursuit along the Metz—Verdun road is important." At midday, in the telegram already quoted earlier, he again writes of the French as "probably in full retreat to Verdun." At 6.30 P.M. his views have changed merely so far as to include *both* the Metz—Verdun roads and to direct the attention of Prince Frederick Charles to the fact that "the fruits of the victory of the 14th can only be reaped by a vigorous offensive against the Metz



—Verdun roads, by Fresnes and by Étain. The Commander-in-Chief of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army is empowered on his own judgment to carry such into effect with all the means at his disposal.”

It will be seen that a divergence existed between the deductions of Moltke and Prince Frederick Charles. The latter was imbued with the idea that the French had got away, and that the operation demanded of him was a pursuit generally westward, at the utmost speed. Moltke, on the other hand, had evidently come to the conclusion that, after all, the French might not be far beyond Metz, and that the morrow might witness not a succession of rear-guard actions, but a great pitched battle. In these circumstances, Moltke is severely taken to task by Marshal Foch for delegating the conduct of the operations to Prince Frederick Charles, who would find himself isolated west of the Moselle, without even all his army, and imbued with a false hypothesis of the enemy's movements. It cannot be denied that a serious risk was being run, but if the risk were high, the success which might be won would be immense. At the root of the whole matter lay the question, could Moltke trust his subordinates to act, should a crisis arise, on the spirit if not the letter of their instructions ; to display initiative ; to exhibit tenacity and resolution ; and to render mutual support unasked ? Such a question answers itself if it is remembered that, mainly as the result of Moltke's teaching, the Prussian army was permeated with the doctrine of the offensive, and that this was a factor on which Moltke felt he could rely. Whatever untoward circumstances might arise it was a foregone conclusion that they would be met by a policy of attack, and that, almost automatically, subordinate commanders, down even to the most junior regimental officers, would display initiative, resolution, and mutual support at the critical moment. A commander, fortified by the conviction that the instrument which he is employing will respond to the severest calls which may be made upon it, may well feel justified in taking risks inseparable from the uncertainty created by the fog of war. And that such confidence in his subordinates was justified to the hilt is clearly brought out by the history of the Franco-German War.

The action of Moltke, in issuing orders for a portion of his

force to cross the Moselle at a moment when the exact situation and intentions of the enemy were still not definitely ascertained, finds a remarkable echo thirty-four years later, when Marshal Oyama detached General Kuroki's force to cross the Tai-tzu Ho. In the latter case it has never been definitely ascertained whether the Japanese Commander-in-Chief did or did not know whether the Russian army was clinging to Liao-yang, or was beginning to retreat. But even assuming that the operation was undertaken with full knowledge that the Russians were holding their ground, the opinion has been passed that "what, therefore, may at first sight appear to be rashness on Marshal Oyama's part may, in fact, be a brilliant example of judicious opportunism, of shrewd exploitation of the suspected weakness of an opponent, and of correct diagnosis of the line of least resistance. The success of his action shows that against an adversary who is either unable or unwilling to strike back a bold and determined attacker can take almost any liberty."<sup>1</sup> The last sentence was as true in 1870 as in 1904. Moltke did not make the mistake of despising his enemy. But a fortnight's warfare had shown him that he was not, at any rate, dealing with a Napoleon or a Lee. And like a bold and resolute commander he was determined to extract the uttermost farthing of advantage from the weakness and irresolution which his adversary had hitherto displayed.

So much for Moltke's handling of the situation on August 15, and for his determination to throw the II<sup>nd</sup> Army over the Moselle at the critical moment. As regards the actual battle of the 16th itself, three charges have been laid at Moltke's door. It has been asserted that, even after the battle had been raging over eight hours, he was still at fault in his deductions. In the second place he is severely criticized in that not only did he authorize Prince Frederick Charles on the 15th to act as might seem best to him when across the Moselle, but even when an important development was reported on the 16th, Moltke still kept in the background and allowed an army commander an unnecessarily

<sup>1</sup> *Official History of the Russo-Japanese War. Prepared by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Comments on the Battle of Liao-yang, vol. ii. p. 187.*

free hand. Thirdly, he is taken to task because, in spite of great numerical superiority, his strategy resulted in a desperate battle taking place in which all the available French forces were pitted against but a small fraction of his own.

As regards the first charge the evidence used against Moltke is as follows. At 5 P.M. during the day of Mars-la-Tour he telegraphed to Steinmetz instructions for the morrow in which was contained the statement, "It is important to throw back the enemy towards the north, so as to cut him off from Paris and Châlons." Three hours later a similar warning was sent to the II<sup>nd</sup> Army, and at the same time Moltke wrote to its Chief of Staff, personally, a short note beginning with the words: "In my opinion the decisive operation which will affect the whole result of the war is to throw back towards the north the enemy's main body, which is abandoning Metz." A study of these three documents induces Marshal Foch to state categorically that Moltke had deduced that the French were retiring in a northerly direction. It may, however, not unfairly be urged that, if the French were voluntarily retiring towards that point, Moltke's insistence on forcibly compelling them in that direction is rather without point. The three documents quoted or referred to by Marshal Foch seem, on the contrary, entirely consistent with the view that Moltke supposed the French anxious to retire *westwards*, i.e. towards Châlons and Paris, but that he was determined to frustrate such intention, to shoulder them off the Metz—Verdun roads, and to push them so hard and so far in a northerly direction as to render any chance of their union with MacMahon out of the question. If such interpretation be conceded, clearly the charge of an erroneous appreciation made during the battle falls to the ground.

The charge brought against Moltke, that he virtually abrogated his functions as *de facto* commander-in-chief by tacitly handing over the conduct of the operations of the 16th to Prince Frederick Charles, is not without foundation. All through the morning General Headquarters remained at Herny, over twenty miles from Pont-à-Mousson, and nearly twice that distance from the decisive sector of the Metz—



Verdun road ; and it was not until about noon that intelligence was received of the great battle which was being fought. During the afternoon Headquarters were transferred to Pont-à-Mousson, where Moltke found awaiting him the despatch from the Chief of Staff of the IInd Army which confirmed and amplified the tidings already received. Moltke had not been slow to grasp the significance of both communications, and during the afternoon and evening orders were issued both to the Ist Army and to the XIIth Corps of the IInd. These, however, had reference merely to the provision of timely support for the morrow ; and for the fighting of the 16th, Prince Frederick had to depend upon himself and his subordinates.

It is worth while to refer again for the moment to the portion of Moltke's order issued at Herny at 6.30 P.M. on the 15th, to which exception has by many critics been taken. The essential paragraph ran as follows :

The circumstances under which the Ist and VIIth Army Corps, as well as portions of the 18th Division, gained a victory last evening [at Borny] precluded all pursuit. The fruits thereof can only be reaped by a vigorous offensive on the part of the IInd Army towards the Metz—Verdun roads, by Fresnes and by Étain. *The Commander-in-Chief of the IInd Army is empowered on his own judgment to carry such into effect with all the means at his disposal.*

The concluding sentence, though receiving no special prominence in the original, has here been emphasized by italics, since not only is it the target at which the fiercest shafts of criticism have been aimed, but because it reveals, in a few words, the revolution which had taken place in the whole system of higher command. By 1870 decentralization had come into its own. It is not necessary to go back to Mack, who defended himself for his failure to hold the Danube in 1805 by the apology that he was at the time drawing up eight pages of orders for the night passage of the river, nor to Tolstoi's description of the night before Austerlitz, with the Austrian Chief of the Staff reading out an endless and complicated set of instructions for the morrow—it is not necessary to go back to these to see to what extent centralization and the cramping of initiative flourished in

former wars. Napoleon himself exacted a blind submission to his orders, which he was wont to dictate in considerable detail to his orderly officers and secretaries. He himself regulated every question, military, administrative, and technical, and his comprehension ranged equally over the grandest plan of operations and over the smallest detail of recruiting or of remounts. The centralization even of a genius produced, however, the inevitable result. In the campaigns of 1812 and 1813 the lieutenants of the Emperor, unaccustomed to think and act for themselves, became the easy prey of opponents of no greater ability whenever they had to act at a distance from the master and without his direct inspiration.

Such a system was abhorrent to a mind such as that of Moltke. In the war of 1866 the more important of his orders are distinguished by a simplicity and brevity which avoided any cramping of the action of the recipients. In 1870 the system was still further extended, and soon after the war of 1870 opened, Moltke's tenure of the office of Chief of the Staff began to be marked by the system by which, in the name of the King, he issued merely general instructions—or "directives"—in the first instance, which his trained General Staff then put into shape. The result of their labours was then submitted to Moltke, who made any additions or corrections found necessary, and the orders, thus revised but still retaining their simplicity, were issued to the army commanders. These directives indicated, as a rule, merely the general situation, the object to be gained, and the general method by which such object was to be secured. In turn the army corps, divisional, and other commanders issued each his own orders, which grew in detail only as the scope was narrowed, with the result that detail never necessarily implied prolixity and was reserved only for the unit actually concerned in carrying it out. So logical and sufficient did the system prove to be that it is indeed the one in universal use to-day. It has been claimed that Moltke was the inventor of it, but this is inexact, for the honour is properly due to General U. S. Grant, who employed it in 1864.

Success by simple orders would, however, have been impossible had not previous organization and training

evolved an army capable of profiting by them. Devolution of authority, decentralization, the fostering of initiative, and above all the inculcation of unity of doctrine were the features which marked the influence of William I. and of Moltke on the training of the Prussian army. In 1870 the seeds which had been sown bore ample fruit. With a staff of the highest quality ; with leaders of the higher grades trained to accept responsibility ; with the offensive accepted as the doctrine for every case ; and with an army still fresh from its triumphs of four years earlier, there was no reason why Moltke should have felt it necessary to do more than notify briefly his intentions and objective to Prince Frederick Charles.

Even if the devolution of responsibility is attacked as faulty, it is but fair to state that never was devolution more amply justified by the recipients on whom it was thrust. From the moment when Prince Frederick Charles felt that his presence on the battle-field, in person, was called for he acted with supreme vigour. He began with a fourteen-mile gallop in fifty-five minutes, and from the instant of his arrival he never wavered in his determination to maintain the pressure against the French at all costs. And von Alvensleben, the commander of the sorely tried IIIrd Corps, justified to the full the reputation he had earned in 1866 as a commander of initiative and resource. Unlike his superior, Alvensleben had early realized the true state of affairs, and in a hurried interview with the commander of the 5th Cavalry Division during the morning he had remarked : " I don't know whether I am the stupidest of mortals or not ; but I have always suspected that we had the whole French army against us, and now I'm sure of it." This revelation, which might well have daunted many a leader in his position, but steeled him to further effort. " I had," he wrote later in his memoirs, " I had clearly before my eyes the strategic goal of the campaign, and I saw distinctly that the situation demanded that I should throw my whole corps into the fight." Acting on this conviction he engaged *au fond*, with but the dim idea of ultimately re-forming what might be the wreck of his whole command behind the Xth Corps, although, as he says, " I did not know whether that corps could or



would advance to my support." Small wonder that later in the day, when the Xth Corps—which was promised to him by 3 P.M.—was nowhere in sight, he exclaimed to his staff, "Soon I shall feel like Wellington: would that night or the Xth Corps would come."

The dogged unyielding tenacity of the German soldiers throughout the desperate hours of Mars-la-Tour has called forth well-merited praise from friend and foe. Marshal Foch in summing up the battle has thus expressed himself:

The repeated attacks of the Germans did not break their enemy. But, right up to the last moment, they blazoned forth the will and the right and the power of the Germans to attack; this kept the French upon the defensive; and this compelled the French Commander-in-Chief—little disposed indeed to cut himself off from Metz—to make his communications his first thought. There is the magnificent lesson; the well-known principle *attack is the best defence* transmuted into *the weaker one is the more one should attack*. Thus can be summarized the action first of General von Alvensleben, and later of Prince Frederick Charles; action based, as we can see, on superb logic, accompanied by virile decisions and by a gift of leadership which can breathe new life into even the most exhausted troops.

In respect of the third charge, however, Marshal Foch is a much less lenient judge, and he has summed up adversely against Moltke. Moltke's leadership he condemns severely, and states that it was only redeemed by the valour and skill of the German troops. "*Une fois de plus,*" he writes, "*la tactique vengeait les désastres de la stratégie, le soldat sauvait la direction supérieure.*" In common with several other French writers of unquestioned eminence and authority the Marshal lays emphasis on the fact that, although Moltke entered France with fifteen corps, having as their object to seek out the principal enemy mass and defeat it, yet when the first real great battle was joined only two corps were engaged, and the Germans were in a very dangerous numerical inferiority.

A reply to this criticism must be divided into two headings. If the charge against Moltke is, in general, that, of his three armies, one—the IIIrd—was not even within striking distance at Mars-la-Tour, the answer is that such dissemina-

tion of front was part and parcel of the German strategical doctrine. Whether that doctrine is or is not superior to that of the so-called French school of strategy is another question, too vast and far-reaching to be argued here. But it may be conceded that, admittedly, one of the drawbacks of a system which consists of an advance on a broad front and without depth is that, before envelopment can be brought about, a portion of the whole strategic line may find itself in difficulties against superior numbers. Moltke must obviously have realized the possibility of such danger, but, convinced of the superiority of the system, it is to his credit that he stuck wholeheartedly to it. This much may be said for the system. It succeeded in Bohemia in 1866, in France in 1870, and in Manchuria in 1904. And had not two corps been subtracted from the German strength in 1914 it is possible that it might even have succeeded in the great and decisive battle of the Marne.

If the charge be narrowed down, by the exclusion of the question of the IIIrd Army, to the fact that of the Ist and IInd but a fraction was available for the battle, the reply can, not unfairly, be based on the analogy of occasions outside of war. Where time is a vital object, risks must be faced boldly to secure the end in view. A hunter who follows up a wounded tiger with precipitancy knows well the risk he has to run. But his experience tells him that he must decide, and decide quickly, either for or against the possibility, amounting to probability, of personal injury on the one hand, and the probability, tending towards certainty, of the escape of the tiger on the other. Such was the position of Moltke on the evening of August 14, 1870. His prey was wounded and escaping. Safety called for a policy of caution, but success could only be won by audacity and speed. By his determination to push on at once, he might have incurred defeat. But he could not have achieved victory—the strategic victory of heading off Bazaine—had he delayed.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—GRAVELOTTE

WHEN, during the afternoon of August 16, General Headquarters arrived at Pont-à-Mousson, it needed no formal despatch to bring home the fact that a great battle was in progress west of the Moselle. Wounded men, orderly officers with reports, staff officers with orders for corps in rear, streamed into the town, while ammunition columns and ambulances went rumbling at full speed in the direction of the battle-field. Alarming reports came in apace during the evening, and the town was thick with the rumours, invariably of a disturbing nature, which grew round a hardly contested struggle. It was not until late at night that trustworthy information was received which showed the day's fighting in its true colours.

Before dawn of the 17th the King and the Headquarters Staff were *en route* to the field and by 6 A.M. were gathered on the hill south of Flavigny, whence a view could be obtained of practically the whole arena of the fighting of the previous day. A strange emptiness now reigned in front of the German outposts, and, although Rezonville was found to be occupied, elsewhere the whole country seemed devoid of French troops. Conflicting information gradually trickled in from the small scouting parties which were sent out. Columns of infantry were reported retiring on Verneville, heavy clouds of dust moving from west to east were observed moving along the Rezonville—Gravelotte road, artillery was said to be marching towards Metz, and from the opposite corner of the field it was reported that the enemy was marching westwards towards Jassy. Thus, in uncertainty and doubt, the morning wore away, and little by little the



Germans, by making practically no use of their cavalry, completely lost touch with the enemy in front of their left and centre. One point only was clear. Far from taking the offensive, as had been at one time feared by the German General Headquarters, the French had obviously retired. On the other hand it was quite uncertain in which direction the retirement was being carried out.

The news of a retirement was welcome, for at first there remained available on the German side, to meet a possible counter-offensive by the French, merely the wearied survivors of the battle of the previous day. But by 1 o'clock the situation had materially improved, for shortly after 6 A.M. the IXth Corps had begun to assemble near Gorze and during the morning the XIIth and Guard Corps—diverted from their race towards the Meuse—moved up upon the left. The VIIth and VIIIth Corps of the Ist Army were within supporting distance on the right, so that without counting the XIIth Corps and the Guards, who could scarcely co-operate before evening, there were still five corps and two cavalry divisions immediately at hand.<sup>1</sup> Although it was important to follow up the success of the previous day the obscurity of the situation, the comparative lateness of the hour, and the fatigue of the troops, which was enhanced by another day of broiling heat, induced Headquarters to postpone any forward movement until the following day. The obscurity might be pierced by intelligence during the afternoon, but, curiously enough, Moltke would not wait and issued the following battle orders at 2 o'clock: "The IInd Army will close up at 5 A.M. to-morrow, August 18, and will advance in echelon from the left between the Yron and Gorze brooks on a general line between Ville-sur-Yron and Rezonville. The VIIIth Corps [of the Ist Army] will conform to this movement on the right of the IInd Army. The VIIth Corps [of the Ist Army] will at first have the duty of covering the movements of the IInd Army against any attempts of the enemy from Metz. His Majesty's further orders will depend on the action of the enemy. Reports will at first be sent to His Majesty to the hill at Flavigny."

<sup>1</sup> IIIrd, IXth, Xth, VIIth, VIIIth Corps, 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions.

Moltke and the King then returned to Pont-à-Mousson and the remainder of the day passed without incident on the field.

On August 18 Prince Frederick Charles was early astir. The task allotted him was an important one, and at 5 A.M. he rode from Buxières to Mars-la-Tour, and thence to Vionville, issuing his instructions verbally to the corps commanders. Owing, however, to his complete failure to make use of his mounted troops for reconnaissance, the Prince was still quite in the dark as to the movements and situation of the French. He considered that the enemy was retiring in a north-westerly direction towards Conflans, and stated that the French troops reported the previous day as bivouacking about Gravelotte would be found to have fallen back. The march of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army did not take place in long columns of route; for, at the risk of slackening the speed of the advance, Prince Frederick Charles ordered each corps to march in close formation of massed divisions with the artillery between the two divisions of the corps. Owing to what has been criticized as indifferent staff work, the routes of the XII<sup>th</sup> (Saxon) and Guard Corps on the left clashed, with the result that considerable delay was caused. The probability of such occurrence had been pointed out to the Prince, but the latter apparently wished that the XII<sup>th</sup> Corps should emerge on the extreme left and allowed the order to stand. The task of the flank corps might prove to be one of considerable difficulty, but Prince Frederick Charles had conceived a generous admiration for his opponent of 1866, and particularly wished the Crown Prince of Saxony to have the post of honour in preference to the Prince of Würtemberg, who commanded the Guards. The delay, however, was to react on the operations of the day.

By 9 o'clock the Saxons on the left had reached Jarny, while the right of the German front was marked by the outposts of the VII<sup>th</sup> Corps on the eastern edge of the Bois de Vaux, south-east of Gravelotte, the intervening terrain being occupied by the remaining corps in irregular grouping—the advance in echelon having become completely disorganized. By that hour the reports which had been received made it clear that the French army was in the vicinity of Metz. Enemy troops were reported opposite the

Bois de Vaux and farther north, upon the heights of Amanvillers, but it was still uncertain whether the French were about to make a stand or were retreating towards Briey in a generally north-westerly or northerly direction. Being in doubt Prince Frederick Charles ordered the northerly advance to be resumed, but at the end of an hour the French troops at Amanvillers were reported still in position. It was now clear that the enemy was not retiring, and the commander of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army wheeled his force to the right so as to attack.

Moltke was again at his post at Flavigny, and by 8 o'clock General Headquarters, acting apparently on intuition—for of real reconnaissance there had been none—came to the conclusion that the main body of the French had fallen back to a position near Metz, and that the right flank of such position was about Amanvillers. A message was sent accordingly to Prince Frederick Charles not to extend his left too wide. An hour and a half later reports, which had meanwhile come in, brought about in Moltke's mind a change of opinion, and he concluded that the French were retreating towards Briey. Then at 10 o'clock news came in from the I<sup>st</sup> Army which made Moltke swing round again to his first conception, and at 10.30 A.M. the real order for the battle was issued from Flavigny.

This order began with the statement that it was believed that the French were making a stand between Point du Jour and Montigny la Grange, while four battalions were known to be in the Bois des Génivaux. Moltke accordingly directed that the two outer corps of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army should move in the direction of Batilly. Should the enemy, after all, be found to be retreating on Briey, then these two corps should come up with him about Ste. Marie aux Chênes; on the other hand, should he remain upon his position then the two flank corps of the Germans were to attack the French right flank at Amanvillers. Stress was laid, in this case, upon the necessity of delivering a simultaneous attack all along the line—by the I<sup>st</sup> Army from the Bois de Vaux and Gravelotte; by the IX<sup>th</sup> Corps of the II<sup>nd</sup> Army against the sector Bois des Génivaux—Verneville; and by the left wing of that army, as directed above, from the north. The important point about this



order is Moltke's incorrect location of the French right flank at Amanvillers.

Before this order had reached the II<sup>nd</sup> Army, the IX<sup>th</sup> Corps had, by order of Prince Frederick Charles, advanced against Verneville, and from the heights near that place the corps commander descried a camp of the French in the state of unreadiness which so often characterized them throughout the campaign. Although it was not clear whether the camp was or was not the flank of the French line, the temptation to surprise it was naturally strong, and accordingly, the guns of the IX<sup>th</sup> Corps were quickly brought into action. The French artillery at once replied. It was now noon and the roar of the guns was clearly heard at Flavigny. Anxious lest the fire-eater Steinmetz should put in his Ist Army prematurely, Moltke sent him a message to say that the action at Verneville was an isolated one, and did not call for a general attack by his army. Steinmetz, however, had heard the fighting long before the message from Moltke reached him, and had brought into action sixteen batteries north and south of Gravelotte.

In front of the hill of Flavigny the field lay like a panorama, but it was not long before columns of smoke rising in denser and blacker volumes from burning farm-houses impaired the wide view at first obtainable, and diminished to a considerable degree the control of the battle exercised by the Chief of the Staff. From the direction of Verneville, however, could be heard the rapid faint crackle of musketry which betokened the action of the IX<sup>th</sup> Corps, and still farther to the left, where the Guards were located, light streaks of vapour rising above the woods were taken to mean that the battle had begun there also ; and not long afterwards, in the direction of Rezonville and Gravelotte, the infantry of the Ist Army could be seen coming into action. A couple of hours thus passed without any change being apparent in the scene. The one factor which admitted of no doubt was that more and more troops were becoming engaged on both sides, and that the fighting was growing in intensity. Reports kept coming in at intervals which were made to the King first, while Moltke, map in hand, explained the situation to the eager onlookers. This done, the Chief of

the Staff, while awaiting the next report, would either return to a seat which had been made for him from some knapsacks, or would occupy the time walking slowly up and down, kicking clods of dirt or small stones here and there, his hands clasped behind his back, his face pale but thoughtful. His emaciated figure, the deep wrinkles in his face, and the crow's feet about his eyes made him look older than his seventy years; and to an observant eye-witness, his whole appearance was suggestive rather of the asceticism of a religious than of ardent devotion to the profession of arms.<sup>1</sup>

At last a report came from General Steinmetz to say that the heights opposite Gravelotte had been taken and that he had sent forward cavalry in pursuit. This report, and the suggestion of a staff officer who had been sent farther to the front and reported that a more forward position was advisable, led the King to order the selection of a new position for General Headquarters. The new point of observation east of Rezonville did not, however, afford a sufficient view, and accordingly Headquarters rode on to Malmaison, a point farther to the front, north-west of Gravelotte.

It was now close upon 5 o'clock. Directly in front of the new position of General Headquarters was a deep ravine-like gully, and along the crest of the opposite heights, which descended steeply in places, lay the French position marked by several farm-houses blazing furiously. To the right lay the village of Gravelotte, through which the main road to Metz, descending steeply to the Mance and rising no less abruptly on the farther side, formed a defile under the fire of the enemy. For the moment, however, so moderate was the artillery fire that it seemed as if the battle had come to a standstill, and conjecture was busy as to whether the French had expended all their ammunition and were preparing to retreat. One thing, however, was clear from the first, and by no means agreeably so, namely that the heights which General Steinmetz had reported as having been captured were, with the exception of the farm-house of St. Hubert at the eastern exit of the Gravelotte defile, by no means in German hands; farther, the cavalry division which had been sent in pursuit, far from being on the opposite

<sup>1</sup> *Personal Memoirs*, General P. H. Sheridan, United States Army.

side of the defile, was, with the exception of one Uhlan regiment, actually on the hither side on the sloping ground towards Gravelotte. Gradually it came out that the masses of cavalry, infantry, and artillery which had been crowded into the defile about half-past three had been heavily fired on just as the 4th Uhlans, which were leading the cavalry, had begun to deploy. The crowding, pushing, and hustling in the narrow road had increased to a terrible extent as two ammunition wagons, with their horses wounded and mad with terror, had galloped madly from St. Hubert back down the road. Every one had felt that a catastrophe was imminent, and then "Threes about" was sounded from the rear of the cavalry division which had reached the road just east of Gravelotte. By half-past four the bulk of the division had extricated itself from the turmoil of the Gravelotte—Metz road and had formed up at its starting-place near Malmaison.

The unfavourable impression gathered as to the progress of the battle on the right was relieved in part by the arrival of a staff officer with news of the IInd Army to the north. It was now clear at any rate that the dispositions of that army were in harmony with the views of Headquarters, and the news that the Saxon corps had pushed down to the valley of the lower Moselle showed that the French right flank must sooner or later be located. The sound of heavy firing to the north, taken in conjunction with the staff officer's report, allowed Headquarters to conclude that the battle was progressing favourably in that direction. And now, during the lull in the fighting near Gravelotte, the IInd Corps, just arrived from Germany, made its appearance on the field after a long and wearisome march from Pont-à-Mousson. To the King of Prussia it seemed that the moment had come for a fresh effort to be made upon the right, and he accordingly directed the commander of the IInd Corps to place himself under the orders of General Steinmetz. At half-past six the 3rd Division and the artillery of the IInd Corps had arrived just west of Gravelotte, and the King at once ordered General Steinmetz to move with all available forces against the heights of Point du Jour. To the issue of this order Moltke raised earnest objection, both as regards the opportunity of attack and the objective assigned. The King, however, per-



sisted, and when Moltke saw that no attention had been paid to his advice and that the II<sup>nd</sup> Corps was heading towards the defile, he moved off some distance with an affectation of aloofness, which made a profound impression on more than one eye-witness of the scene. But before General Steinmetz had issued the necessary instructions the French lines were in movement with the object of striking a counter blow.

It was the arrival of the German II<sup>nd</sup> Corps on the field which had brought about this sudden offensive on the part of the French. That corps had advanced from Rezonville to Gravelotte in three groups, each on a brigade frontage and with bands playing and colours flying. Lit up by the rays of the setting sun this reinforcement striding along to receive its baptism of fire had been magnified by the French observers from the heights opposite Gravelotte into a reserve army of at least two complete corps. The decision was quickly taken to use every available man to attack this advancing mass at the moment when it should emerge from the Gravelotte defile; and although the attack took place earlier than was intended, and with only a portion of the French troops actually at hand, it was the most energetic offensive of the day and its result was proportionately great.

The attack began with the advance of a cloud of French skirmishers, who were followed at a short distance by columns at regular intervals; and with drums and bugles playing, the whole line rushed down the hill with shouts of *Courage!* and *En avant!* Various bodies of the German VII<sup>th</sup> and VIII<sup>th</sup> Corps were quickly swept away, and to the watchers at Malmaison it seemed as if the French might be borne by the *élan* of the attack through the Mance ravine right up to Gravelotte. The German artillery had followed the enemy's advance with their fire, but it was impossible to say whether the French could be brought to a standstill east of the stream. Just then swarms of panic-stricken German infantry burst out from the western edge of the wooded ravine, and overran the German artillery in action. Driven on by terror, rushing onward with loud yells, it was impossible to be certain that they were not a portion of the French assailants. Considerable anxiety was, therefore, felt on the German side, and many eyes were turned to seek

the expected IInd Corps. The mob of fugitives did not stop until it arrived in rear of the line of artillery, where it was met by officers of all arms and all ranks from generals to lieutenants, who strove energetically to reorganize and reform the terrified groups.

Meanwhile the last brigade of the VIIIth Corps had been put into the fight, and, for some reason which has never been adequately explained, it was followed by the 9th Hussars. The cavalry regiment passed through the ravine by the main road in column of threes and eventually halted in the same formation west of the farm of St. Hubert. It had by this been joined by a reserve squadron, mounted on unbroken horses, and when it was found necessary to withdraw the cavalry, the reserve squadron moved off first at a trot, which grew faster and faster as the untrained horses grew frightened at the clatter and the fire. The reserve squadron carried with it half of another. Shells bursting over them, and impediments of all kinds increased the difficulty of the situation, until to the astonishment of all observers at Gravelotte a mass of cavalry burst at headlong speed out of the western edge of the wood in the Mance ravine. Worse, however, was yet to come. On the right-hand side of the main road were wagons of all kinds and led horses, which had up to this time been in the best possible order, so that the whole of the left side of the road had been quite unencumbered. The teams of these wagons, startled by the rush of the hussars, turned about and crowded into mixed masses. Officers rushed with drawn swords among the wild masses of men and horses, and endeavoured to stem the raging flood, but all to no purpose; hussars, infantry of various units, led horses and orderlies, with baggage and other wagons, were all jumbled up together, and rushed tumultuously along the road to the rear. The confusion was indescribable, and Headquarters and the staff of the Ist Army anxiously watched the unusual scene. The advancing IInd Corps, magnificent as was its appearance, could not efface the terrible sight. Many of the fugitives did not draw rein until they reached Vionville, shouting as they raced along "*Wir sind geschlagen!*"

By this time the King of Prussia had left the field. When the French made their counter-attack, shells and bullets had

begun to strike the knoll upon which General Headquarters were posted ; and yielding, though with considerable reluctance, to the urgent requests of his staff King William mounted his horse and rode back slowly to Rezonville. On the way he became involved in a mass of fugitives whom he proceeded to berate with a flow of language which opened the eyes even of General Sheridan, accustomed though he was to the " Dutch " swearing of the old slave days in Ohio. Moltke, however, remained behind and for a short distance accompanied the leading regiment of the IInd Corps, an action which gave rise immediately after the battle to an apocryphal story that he had led that corps personally to the attack. The day had begun to decline when the foremost battalions of the IInd Corps emerged from the Gravelotte ravine, but neither space nor time was favourable for their action, and progress was seriously impeded by a flood of fugitives of various units pouring back, in a third panic of the battle in this quarter of the field. At last the order came to stop the fight ; at 10 o'clock the troops of the IInd Corps rested on the field in close proximity to the French line, and the disordered remnants of the VIIth and VIIIth Corps were withdrawn and reorganized in rear.

At half-past ten Moltke mounted his horse and set off in silence along the high road to Rezonville. Never communicative, his taciturnity was now so marked as to be the subject of whispered comment by his staff who followed just in rear. His thoughts as he rode on must have been of a gloomy nature, for the impression he had gained of the battle, in the section where the Ist Army had been engaged, had been by no means favourable. He had seen his troops, if not actually defeated, at any rate seriously checked ; far worse, he had witnessed a sight which no commander can view without horror—disciplined soldiers turned by panic into a terror-stricken mob. To the knowledge gained by personal observation of a check in one quarter of the field there were added no compensatory tidings as to what had taken place in the other. Since 5 o'clock no report had been received from Prince Frederick Charles, and that message had only revealed the situation as it existed early in the day. In a great battle a few hours can bring about dramatic



changes ; favourable reports can in those hours be completely falsified ; and Moltke probably reflected on how the situation of the Ist Army had changed while Headquarters were moving from Flavigny to Malmaison, where the news which had greeted him was in terrible contradiction of what he had been led to believe from Steinmetz's roseate despatch. Were Prince Frederick Charles, away on the left, to suffer a check like that of the Ist Army, the situation would undoubtedly call for anxiety ; were he to suffer a real defeat, the position of the German army after its wheel of a hundred and eighty degrees would be one of the greatest gravity.

It was after 11 o'clock when Rezonville was reached. In the general atmosphere of dejection the inevitable Cassandras were in their element. The King was found seated near a barn close by the roadside in front of a blazing fire, and, as Moltke approached, a voice was heard addressing the King with the impressive words, " In my humble opinion, Sire, considering our heavy losses to-day, we should not continue our offensive to-morrow but should await attack by the French." With characteristic imperturbability Moltke stepped forward into the firelight and remarked quietly, " Should the enemy make a further stand outside Metz to-morrow, your Majesty has only to give the order for the continuation of the attack." <sup>1</sup>

Wrapped in a cloak taken from a dead soldier on the battle-field, Moltke sat waiting the eagerly expected news from Prince Frederick Charles, in a state of uncertainty which can be easily imagined, but—as was always the case with him in critical circumstances—in perfect calm. For a time he even slept ; and then, at last, after midnight came in the message announcing victory achieved by Prince Frederick Charles's army. The enemy's right wing was turned ; the French were completely defeated ; and from St. Privat they were streaming back towards Metz. The Cassandras were stupefied ; the old King busied himself in drafting a glowing telegram to the Queen of Prussia ; and Moltke in a crowded

<sup>1</sup> The giver of the advice to the King is generally supposed to have been Roon, the Minister of War. Some authorities, however, assert that it was Bismarck.

room, among the remains of food and by the light of some candle-ends stuck in bottles, proceeded to draw up the dispositions for reaping the fruits of his great victory.<sup>1</sup>

The battle of Gravelotte is of especial interest in that the strategic situation had become so abnormal that the attacking Germans had their backs to Paris, while the defending French faced it. To put the matter more succinctly, each side had given up its communications, although with the French the surrender was more apparent than real, for they still kept their grip on the magazines of the great fortress of Metz. Further, it was the first great battle of the war fought upon a definite and pre-arranged plan ; although, as events turned out, for the third time within a fortnight and for the fifth time since the war began, action was brought on prematurely by the impetuosity of a subordinate commander. A further interest naturally attaches to it in view of the fact that it was the first battle in France at which Moltke was present in person in the field. Fought within a few hours and a few miles of the outstanding battle of Mars-la-Tour, that of Gravelotte differed essentially from its predecessor. An encounter battle was succeeded by an attack against a strong and entrenched position ; the brilliant charges and counter-charges of cavalry, so characteristic of Mars-la-Tour, were to find no place ; and so far from the tactical issue being uncertain, it was to be clearly marked, though, in this respect, the decision was to be divided. The battle was really two battles, those of St. Privat and Gravelotte proper, in one of which the Germans were conspicuously successful, while in the other they had certainly not achieved victory. As a whole, however, the battle ended in a tactical success for the Germans, and the strategic victory which resulted was unquestionable. That the magnitude of the result was due less to German prowess than to the decision of Bazaine to retire into Metz, is undoubtedly true ; but to lay down a line of demarcation to define where, in the mind of the French

<sup>1</sup> There are several discrepancies, as to the hour when Moltke received news of the victory of the IInd Army on the left, between the *German Official Account*, Hoenig's *24 Stunden Moltkescher Strategie*, Verdy's *With the Royal Headquarters*, Goltz's *Moltke*, Moltke's *Gesammelte Schriften*, etc. Some of these discrepancies are pointed out in Lieutenant-Colonel Picard's *1870, Saint-Privat*.

Marshal, the sense of tactical failure ended and the sense of political motive began is a profitless task. The battle was a great victory for the Germans, and Moltke is entitled to the lion's share of the credit for it.

So far in the narrative of the battle little has been said of the French dispositions ; designedly so, for the object has been to view the contest not as it seems now, when its secrets have long been laid bare, but, so far as possible, as it appeared to Moltke standing on the high ground near Flavigny, or later in the day near Malmaison. Soon after the last shots had been exchanged at the battle of Mars-la-Tour, Bazaine had sent for his Chief of Staff and dictated his orders for the following day. These were to the effect that owing to the great expenditure of ammunition, and to the scarcity of supplies, the retreat on Châlons was to be abandoned. Instead, the Army of the Rhine was to fall back towards Metz and to take up a defensive position on the Plappeville plateau from Rozerieulles to Amanvillers. Subsequently, the right was extended and the general line of defence extended to Roncourt and St. Privat.

With the exception of the 4th Corps, the corps of the Army of the Rhine had received their instructions between 1 A.M. and 2 A.M. on the 17th, and by dawn the French were on their way to their new position. The retirement was carried out in excellent order, and during the day the various corps arrived on the particular sectors allotted to them. On the left was Frossard's 2nd Corps at Point du Jour and along the Rozerieulles spur to the bend in the Metz—Gravelotte high road. Working from south to north next in order came the 3rd Corps of Marshal Le Bœuf, in whose sector were the strong points formed by the farms of St. Hubert, Moscow, Leipzig, and La Folie. Between La Folie and a point half-way between Amanvillers and the hamlet of Jerusalem was Ladmirault's 4th Corps. The extreme right was held as far as Roncourt by the 6th Corps of Marshal Canrobert. Cavalry was in rear of both flanks, and a brigade of the 5th Corps was posted in the valley of the Moselle. Headquarters were in rear of the left, at Plappeville, where Bazaine retained the Imperial Guard as a General Reserve.

The French position extended for some seven miles, and



lay along the west of a ridge between two ravines, which became gradually shallower as they approached the right. The left was naturally strong and received additional protection from the proximity of the forts of Plappeville and St. Quentin, while the centre was exceptionally well adapted for defence, not only from the lie of the ground, but from the asset formed by the strong points made up of the stoutly built farm-houses which defined it. The right flank at St. Privat was, however, weak, both by nature and position, and the position as a whole, though generally strong, suffered from the woods which ran up to the occupied line in front. A further drawback was the absence of depth caused by the existence of the steep wooded ravine in rear, although, on the other hand, this conformation of the ground was favourable for the movement of reserves.

It appears certain that, as early as the 15th, Bazaine had definitely made up his mind not to cut himself off from Metz, and his action in fighting on the 16th, and again two days later, was probably due to a desire to give the appearance of complying with his Emperor's final instructions. In addition, his decision to accept battle on the Rozerieulles—St. Privat position was undoubtedly influenced by his wish to fight a defensive battle with the advantage conferred by the long-range chassépôt rifle. This defensive tactical system had been strongly favoured by Niel, and the French army had been inoculated with the doctrine that the breech-loading rifle favoured the defensive. There was, undoubtedly, something to be said for the idea, for, if the Germans in hurling themselves against the French position were to suffer the losses which votaries of the chassépôt expected, their position would be serious. It has been maintained by German critics that even in this event the assailants could have broken off the fight and swung back on to the IIIrd Army between Nancy and the Meuse. Such a movement would, however, have been full of extraordinary difficulties, which have not escaped the notice of the more modern critics of the battle.

When night fell on August 17, the French and German forces had lain practically along two lines, which formed a right angle about the Bois de Vaux, the Germans facing north,

while their opponents fronted to the west. A right-angled triangle, of which the base was ten miles and the perpendicular seven, could have been so superimposed as to contain within it practically every soldier who went into action on the morning of the 18th. The astonishing thing to bear in mind is that, even during the forenoon of August 18, German General Headquarters were in almost complete ignorance of the position of their opponents, although both armies were posted within an area of but some thirty-five square miles, and were actually in contact at one point. This ignorance was due to the extraordinary inactivity of the German cavalry all through the 17th and the morning of the 18th, and it has not unnaturally evoked considerable and unfavourable comment on the remissness of the Higher Command. Owing to the extreme feebleness of the service of exploration it resulted that for twenty-four hours no real information was received about a hostile army of 150,000 men leisurely taking up a position but a few miles away. This essential negation of the rôle of cavalry reacted distinctly on the opening phases of the battle of Gravelotte, and the false conception of Moltke that the French right rested somewhere in the vicinity of Amanvillers was the direct and unfortunate consequence of it.

Prince Albert alone had made any real use of mounted troops throughout the 17th, and the cavalry of his XIIth (Saxon) Corps was pushed out towards the Étain road. It did not, however, probe sufficiently deep into the fog of war, although the negative information it sent back was of value. As for the cavalry of the Prussian corps, it remained throughout the day in masterly inactivity. After the fierce combats of Mars-la-Tour the troopers and horses of the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions well deserved a day of rest ; but the remainder of the available mounted troops had not the same excuse for inaction. With the arrival of the IXth Corps and the Guards, over a score of squadrons were available for exploration. To allow a defeated enemy to slip away without a trace is contrary to all the accepted principles of war, and Moltke has been severely, and it seems not undeservedly, taken to task for his remissness in this respect. His action—or rather inaction—is in curious contrast to the emphasis

he laid but a few days before on the necessity of vigorous cavalry reconnaissance. His initial orders for the battle of Gravelotte were issued at 2 P.M. on the 17th, and, considering the unfavourable character of the general situation, it is little short of amazing that, in the orders, there is not a single word with respect to cavalry reconnaissance or scouting.

The issue of these orders at an hour when there was, as yet, no certainty with regard to the movements or the intentions of the enemy, has also evoked considerable criticism. According to Hoenig, and as accepted by critics of standing like Marshal Foch and Colonel Picard, the reason is to be found in the necessity of securing a good night's rest for the King of Prussia. The King had left Pont-à-Mousson at dawn on the 17th. Considering the age of the monarch, the day by 2 P.M. had been a hard one, and a desire to take rest was quite intelligible, seeing that the Germans intended to attack and fresh exertions would be called for from the King, of a kind which would impose severe physical strain on a man of his age. Neither temporary nor complete rest could be obtained at Flavigny, since such accommodation as existed was full of wounded, and in these circumstances it was thought to be advisable to return to Pont-à-Mousson. Hoenig considers the desire to secure complete rest for the King at this juncture as quite intelligible (*wohl begreiflich*), but the ordinary man will probably be of opinion that to purchase the sovereign's repose at the expense of issuing battle orders while the situation was by no means clear was bad policy. At Sedan King William was at his post of observation at an early hour, but during that battle he seems to have gone through the day without undue stress. It is worthy of remark, too, that Blumenthal some six weeks later made the entry in his diary: "It is almost incredible that a man of His Majesty's age should be capable of standing fatigue in the way he does, whilst we all get knocked up." At the triumphal entry of the troops into Berlin in 1871 the King—then Emperor—went eight hours without rest or food.

In ordering the II<sup>nd</sup> Army to advance in echelon of corps from the left, Moltke provided for the contingency



that the French might either be retiring by the northern roads or might be retiring towards Metz. For the left wing of the IIInd Army, moving northward by Doncourt, would, in the first case, attack the enemy if in retreat—always provided that the delay of the 17th had not given the French too long a start—while the right wing would hurry up in support. And in case the enemy should retire on Metz, the left wing was to swing round eastward and envelop any position taken up, while a wheel of the remaining corps to the right would bring them in position for a frontal attack. Such a disposition was undoubtedly sound, but it certainly does not merit the paeans of praise bestowed upon it by Hoenig in his *24 Stunden Moltkescher Strategie*, where the orders—except for the omission of mention of the cavalry—are styled “a work of genius,” and the statement is made that “so far as human genius could suffice for such a task, Moltke’s foresight and grasp of the situation were equal to the demands made.” After reading such extravagant panegyric there is almost a feeling of relief to be found in the words of a more outspoken German critic: <sup>1</sup> “In the eyes of official critics this famous order is a classic. It is, in reality, an obvious one. . . . Why make such a fuss over an ordinary directive which even a young student would have made?”

The concluding paragraphs of the classic order—which laid down that reports were to be sent at first to the King at Flavigny—who would then issue fresh instructions based on the intelligence gained of the enemy—have come in for some trenchant criticism from Marshal Foch, who points out that, by his failure to employ his cavalry to explore, Moltke had laid down a system which was bound to prove unworkable. If and when Prince Frederick Charles discovered the enemy it was not likely that he would suspend action until an orderly officer had found the King, far behind at Flavigny, and had returned with “fresh instructions.” Inevitably, the IIInd Army would, long before this, be drawn into an engagement, directed not by General Headquarters, but by Prince Frederick Charles himself. As a matter of fact this is exactly what happened.

Would it have been possible for Moltke to retain the

<sup>1</sup> Karl Bleibtreu.

direction of the whole battle in his hands had a suitable position for General Headquarters been chosen, and chosen in time? Certainly it is open to question whether Malmaison was the best place to choose, and it is fairly obvious that, if Moltke was to exercise any real influence from there, he ought to have arrived earlier than he did. When Malmaison was reached the Ist Army was in a position by no means favourable. Steinmetz had fought gallantly, but his impetuous attacks had used up an enormous number of men unnecessarily and a directing hand was urgently required to co-ordinate his efforts with those of the IIInd Army to the north. A position for General Headquarters so near Gravelotte was, in itself, injudicious. It was too near the right wing, and consequently too far from the left, with the result that Moltke gained a rather distractingly vivid impression of affairs upon the right, while his knowledge of how things were going on the left was too limited. From this it came about that there was perhaps a superfluity of direction in one quarter, while in the other Prince Frederick Charles was left to make the best of a situation by himself. Well did he come out of the ordeal, and his decision to place the Crown Prince of Saxony on the outer flank was amply justified. Nevertheless the upshot was that practically two separate battles were waged, and taken as a whole Gravelotte was a "ragged" battle. It lacked the finish of Königgrätz; but the finish so obvious there was rendered possible by active preliminary cavalry reconnaissance which marked down the enemy before the Prussian movement began.

But although far better results might have been obtained—so far as the direction of the battle was concerned—had a more central position been chosen as the site of General Headquarters, it is doubtful, in view of the system of communication practised, whether one man could have effectually controlled a battle in which nearly 200,000 men were engaged on the German side alone, and fought along a front of nearly nine miles. This raises the point as to why the resources of the field telegraph were not employed to link up General and Army Headquarters at least. By 1870 the telegraph was no new feature of war, and seven Field Telegraph Detachments had mobilized as an

integral part of the Prussian army. Yet throughout the battle Moltke was dependent upon liaison and mounted officers, certainly so far as the left wing of the German army was concerned. The handicap thus imposed was considerable, and although the capabilities of the field telegraph were naturally not then developed to the same high pitch as they are to-day, it is hard to believe that insuperable difficulties existed in uniting by wire the headquarters of the Ist and IInd armies with a central co-ordinating position occupied by the Chief of the Staff.<sup>1</sup>

It may be said at once, however, that neither a central position nor the most perfect system of communication would have compensated for the fact that there was no real General Reserve at the sole disposition of the Commander-in-Chief. The title has been conferred on the IInd Corps, but inasmuch as, even by a forced march, its arrival on the field could not take place until well on in the afternoon, it is clear that no General Reserve in the full acceptation of the term and capable of being used at any moment to exploit an advantage or to parry a dangerous thrust, really existed. Had a thoroughly serious situation arisen, effective communication would merely have brought home more vividly to General Headquarters the want of a fresh force at hand to restore the day. The necessity of providing a strong General Reserve was not, however, part of Moltke's method of fighting a battle, and was indeed, in a sense, generally foreign to the Prussian system of the offensive. Had it been desired to form a body of this nature, no difficulty would have been encountered, for the units which had borne the brunt of Mars-la-Tour were in second line and could therefore have been formed into a General Reserve.

The incident which occurred about putting in the only available reserve—the IInd Corps—is of exceptional interest in that it brings out the weak point of the organization of the German Headquarters in 1870, namely the drawback

<sup>1</sup> Apart from any technical difficulty the Higher Command were averse from using telegraph communication with the various army headquarters in action, partly for fear lest the wire might be tapped by the enemy, but chiefly lest the initiative of army commanders might be weakened if they were "tied" to a wire. See Buchholtz, *Über die Thätigkeit der Feld-telegraphen*, pp. 13 and 43.



experienced when a royal Commander-in-Chief was able to override the protests of the real commander of the army. King William, not unnaturally, was strongly desirous of bringing about a decision after so much toil, and before daylight should cease. But it is now generally held that Moltke was amply justified in deprecating the order issued by the King. An attack by the Ist Army, reinforced by the IIInd Corps, demanded a place of assembly, a zone of deployment, preliminary reconnaissance, and sufficient space for manœuvre. Every one of these essentials was lacking, and at such an advanced hour of the day it was unwise to fritter away the last available fresh troops. In the Official Account Moltke, with characteristic self-effacement, was careful not to damage the prestige of William I. His words were :—

It would have been preferable if the Chief of the Staff of the Army, who was present on the spot, had not allowed this advance to take place at so late an hour of the evening. A nucleus of troops, altogether intact, might have been most desirable on the following day, but could scarcely, on this evening, bring about a decisive change.

But this statement, although it does credit to the loyalty of the writer, merely emphasizes the drawback which existed.

Looking at what may be called the Battle Royal of Metz as a whole, it has been claimed in the German Official Account that the battles of Borny, Mars-la-Tour and Gravelotte formed by their connection and sequel the preparation, the prologue, and the *dénouement* of one single grand operation, of which the last act was the encircling of the whole of the principal French army by a ring of fire. This is, however, to give Moltke credit for a gift of divination to which he has in fact no real right. The battle of Borny was, admittedly, brought on unexpectedly and contrary to the instructions of German General Headquarters ; while Mars-la-Tour came as a surprise, and in it two isolated corps were for a time in danger of annihilation. After that battle the victorious Germans passed the night in close contact with the French, but on the following day the latter were allowed to slip away unobserved, and their exact position was unknown throughout the whole of the morning of the 18th. Even if the battles of Borny and Mars-la-Tour be left out of the discussion for the

moment, to contend that after the latter battle Moltke could be certain that Bazaine would neither counter-attack, nor endeavour to retreat north or north-west, nor retire at once through Metz and emerge from its eastern or southern gates in an attack against the German communications, is palpably absurd. Where Moltke was great was not in divination, but in his consistent firmness in adhering to one general plan, and in utilizing every incident to further it. He possessed the gift *par excellence* of a Great Captain—a confident boldness. Imperturbable and unswerving, he refused to envisage defeat. He did not hesitate to expose his own communications so as to sever those of his enemy; there was no question of defeat or victory, since it was the enemy who must be beaten. Even when on the night of Gravelotte the question of renouncing the offensive was seriously considered by the Higher Command, Moltke was confident in his ability to see the matter through on the following day; and when at last the belated tidings of victory arrived Moltke lost not a moment in preparing for a further advance.

The theory has actually been put forward that it was not necessary to attack the French at all—after the German change of front had been completed—but merely to await developments. The partisans of this view maintain that in the circumstances either Bazaine would have been forced to fall back into Metz, which would have secured for the Germans without bloodshed a result on which they actually expended 20,000 men; or, if he wished to open a line of retreat, the Germans would not have been called upon to attack a specially prepared position, but would have forced Bazaine to take the offensive. The weak point in the argument is not that it is untrue, but that it does not state the whole truth, for the two alternatives quoted above by no means exhaust the possibilities open to Bazaine. He might, for instance, have retired into Metz, not merely to immure himself in the fortress, but using it as a pivot of manœuvre to emerge from the east or south against the German communications, and thus to exploit the advantage of interior lines. Again, the time which he might thus have gained might have been sufficient to allow MacMahon with the

Army of Châlons to advance against the rear of the Germans to their considerable peril. And a patent objection to the proposed waiting tactics of the Germans is that it would have surrendered the initiative to the French. To have done so at a moment when the invaders had wheeled through an angle of one hundred and eighty degrees, were facing an immense fortress, had their backs to a possible relieving army, and were living on exposed and improvised communications would have been sheer madness. Even if Moltke had, for the sake of argument, seriously considered such a course of action it is difficult to imagine how he could have controlled the tension which would have ensued from the proximity of two great armies—one flushed with victory, and the other stung by the recollection of failure. The needle-guns and chassepôts would have gone off by themselves.

During the afternoon of the 19th, Moltke returned to Pont-à-Mousson. Von Verdy and Winterfeld were with him in the carriage, and throughout the drive the Chief of the Staff did not break the chain of his meditations except for three short remarks. The first time was when passing a portion of the battle-field of the 16th where lay heaps of still unburied Voltigeurs of the Guard, in whose foremost ranks lay a young German non-commissioned officer still grasping his rifle with fixed bayonet. Seeing him the General said, "This was the bravest of the brave." Later he spoke of the battle of Gravelotte: "Once more have I learned that one cannot be too strong upon the battle-field." The third time he spoke was when the carriage was nearing the journey's end. "What," asked Moltke, "would be our feelings now if we had been beaten?"

He knew what defeat at Gravelotte would have meant, but his mind had refused to contemplate it until the battle had been fought and won.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—SEDAN

ON the day after Gravelotte it was definitely ascertained that the French army had retired on Metz and had occupied unassailable positions under the protection of the outer forts. To prevent it from co-operating further with the Army of Châlons which was still in the field it was necessary to take steps for the immediate investment of the fortress. This involved a radical change in the German plans, for the siege of Metz had not been foreseen in the original plan of campaign. The intention had been merely to mask the place by a corps of observation, while the main army should seek out the main enemy mass, but in the existing circumstances the fortress must be invested, and this necessitated a complete redistribution of the army.

Accordingly, at 11 o'clock on the morning of the 19th, Moltke issued the following orders :

After the victories of the last few days it is advisable and possible to grant a rest to the troops so that they can make good their losses. On the other hand it is essential that the armies should continue their march on Paris on a level front so as to be able to oppose with sufficient strength the new formations assembling at Châlons. In the event of the French Army, which has been thrown back on Metz, endeavouring to break out to the west, six of our corps on the left bank of the Moselle, and in position on the heights taken by us yesterday, will oppose such attempt. On the right bank there will be one corps and a reserve division which, if necessary, will fall back before an attack made in superior force.

For the investment His Majesty designates the 1st Army *plus* the II<sup>nd</sup>, III<sup>rd</sup>, IX<sup>th</sup> and X<sup>th</sup> Corps and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division. Prince Frederick Charles will be in command of the investing force.

The Guard, IVth, and XIIth Corps with the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions will be placed under the orders of the Crown Prince of Saxony. . . . The IIIrd Army will halt for the moment on the Meuse.

The advance westward began almost at once. The IIIrd Army, after crossing the Vosges, had been pressing westward in three columns covered by cavalry divisions. Leaving a brigade to observe Toul the foremost troops reached the line of the Meuse on August 19, and in accordance with the orders above quoted halted there for two days in order to allow the newly formed army of the Crown Prince of Saxony to come up into line. That force had received the name of the Army of the Meuse, and by the evening of August 22 the two armies, with a combined strength of some 224,000 men and 813 guns, faced westward on a front of fifty miles from Étain to Gondrecourt.

Beyond the fact that it was known that French forces were assembling under MacMahon at Châlons there was little evidence of the intentions of the enemy. Of the several courses open to him the most likely one for him to adopt seemed to be a slow retirement on to Paris, so as to form the nucleus of an army to defend the capital. On the other hand, there was the possibility that he would make a stand at Châlons, where the new army was being formed ; or he might take up a flanking position, say at Laon, or to the south, threatening the German march on Paris—a plan which would probably have commended itself to Moltke had the situation been reversed. Another possibility was that the Army of Châlons might attempt to come to the relief of the Army of the Rhine shut up in Metz.

There was nothing for the Germans to do but to advance somewhat on the lines of a great reconnaissance in force, while prepared to act with decision and energy so soon as the position had become more clear. The idea underlying Moltke's dispositions was to drive his enemy, if discovered on or north of the road to the capital, away from the Paris road to the northward ; and, accordingly, the advance was carried out in such a manner as to give the IIIrd Army, on the left, a day's start, so as to be in a position to form the enveloping flank of the right wheel which would necessarily

result. By this time the exploration work of the German cavalry had sensibly improved, and the 4th Cavalry Division, reconnoitring boldly to front and flanks, pushed its scouts on the 24th as far as Châlons. No signs of a relieving army met their view. The great camp stood deserted, and immense piles of burning stores bore witness to the definite abandonment of the place by the French. Of the possible courses of action previously considered open to the enemy one could now be eliminated, for a stand at Châlons was no longer to be reckoned with.

It is now necessary to turn to the French side and to relate what had taken place to account for the disappearance of the Army of Châlons from the camp. After his defeat at Woerth on August 6 MacMahon had retired leisurely to Bayon and Neufchâteau, and from this neighbourhood the 1st Corps was despatched by rail to Châlons, followed by the 5th Corps, the greater part of which marched by road. Of the 7th Corps one division only had been engaged at Woerth, while the other two were at Belfort and Lyons and were then eventually railed *via* Paris to join MacMahon. A new 12th Corps had also been formed at Châlons from the division which had hitherto guarded the Spanish frontier, some battalions of marines, and newly formed regiments.

The military value of this Army of Châlons was poor. The *moral* of the troops which had fought at Woerth has already been described, and that of the divisions of the 7th Corps—the corps of Zola's *Débâcle*—which had not participated in that battle was not above reproach, and in one of the divisions was very bad indeed. The division which came from Belfort had given way to disgraceful panic on the occasion of a mere demonstration by a small detachment of Württemberg troops in the Black Forest, and almost incredible scenes of drunkenness, indiscipline, and insubordination had been witnessed. The 12th Corps was made of sterner stuff, but it was below its anticipated strength. Some battalions of Parisian Gardes Mobiles were to have been incorporated in it, but the *moral* of these hooligans in uniform was so appalling that it would have been madness to confront them with the enemy. They were accordingly taken back to Paris by General Trochu, who had been appointed



Governor of the capital, their conduct during the journey by rail being on a par with their military value.<sup>1</sup> Taken all round, the Army of Châlons was a bad army in every sense of the word. It was a medley of beaten soldiers and raw levies. The marines, though excellent troops, were unaccustomed to marching. The cavalry was indifferently mounted. The administrative services were poor and a deficiency of supplies was soon apparent.

Soon after his arrival from Metz Napoleon III. had assembled a Council of War and the decision was arrived at that MacMahon should lead back the army to Paris, but this project was abandoned in view of a pressing appeal from the Empress to advance to the relief of Metz. The counter-proposal was strengthened by the receipt of a belated message from Bazaine, written after the battle of Mars-la-Tour, to the effect that he hoped to continue his march westward. Torn between the desire not to desert his fellow marshal and the conviction that a battle could best be delivered under the powerful fortifications of Paris, MacMahon decided upon a compromise. He proposed to march to Rheims, where he would take up a position which would enable him to await developments, and at the same time flank the direct approaches to Paris. Châlons was, therefore, evacuated on the 21st, and the 7th Corps and portion of the 5th, on reaching the camp to join MacMahon, found merely blazing piles of clothing and stores, of which they were sorely in need. These troops were then railed to Rheims, and on their arrival the Marshal found himself at the head of an army of indifferent quality, amounting to 133,600 infantry, 16,500 cavalry, 402 guns, and 84 *mitrailleuses*.

The next four fateful days were marked by the recrudescence in MacMahon's mind of the sound policy of retiring on the capital, by political pressure put upon him to consider the feelings of the populace of Paris, and by belated and indefinite despatches from Bazaine. The orders for the Paris march had actually been issued when a despatch from Bazaine, written after Gravelotte, announced that he was still determined to press forward, this time in a northerly direction, and fight his way, by a detour, to Châlons. It

<sup>1</sup> See Comte d'Hérisson, *Journal of a Staff Officer*, p. 26.

seemed possible to MacMahon that Bazaine might already have begun this movement, and, determined not to desert his comrade, he countermanded the order for marching on Paris, and on the 23rd telegraphed to Thionville a message for Bazaine to the effect that he was starting in the direction of Montmédy. The inefficiency of the French administrative staff now became obvious. Food ran short and a detour through Rethel was necessary. Another valuable day was thus lost, and on August 25 the army stood with its main forces along the Aisne between Rethel and Vouziers.

It was during the morning of the 24th that the staff of the German IIIrd Army had received word from the 4th Cavalry division of the evacuation of Châlons by the French, and this information, when fitted in with other intelligence received, somewhat clarified the situation. On the previous day there had come in fairly accurate intelligence of the composition of the Army of Châlons, and an order of battle was circulated by General Headquarters. Further, it had been reported by secret service agents that the Emperor with a large number of troops was at Rheims. During the 24th, therefore, while General Headquarters were moving from Commercy to Bar-le-Duc, the King and his staff had a conference with the Crown Prince at Ligny, and there, for the first time, the opinion was put forward—by the Quarter-master-General Podbielski—that the French were meditating a march to relieve Bazaine. This inference was confirmed by various reports, and Moltke, though still surprised that the enemy should venture on an operation of such peril, gradually made up his mind that “political requirements might have outweighed all considerations,” and that the French were indeed on their way to the Meuse.

At all costs—even at the expense of reducing the army investing Metz—Moltke determined to prevent the union of MacMahon and Bazaine. Assuming that the Army of Châlons had left Rheims on the 24th and had marched rapidly, it might succeed in crossing the Meuse before it could be headed off. The Germans, however, were upon the chord of the arc along which MacMahon must travel, and it was possible, if not to prevent him crossing the Meuse, at any rate to block his way to Metz. Moltke, therefore, determined

that the Army of the Meuse should be ready to move to the eastern bank of the river, and that two corps should be taken from the army round Metz to join hands with the Crown Prince of Saxony ; the united forces were then to take up a position between the Meuse and the Moselle, between Damvillers and Longuyon, and attack MacMahon. Meanwhile the IIIrd Army was to advance northwards to occupy the roads between Rethel and the Meuse, and thus threaten the French flank and rear. The actual order to carry out the movements stated above was, however, deferred until the situation should become more clear.

By the afternoon of the 25th, all doubt as to the course to pursue was removed. French newspapers which reached General Headquarters contained the vehement speeches delivered in the National Assembly as to the disgrace of leaving the brave Bazaine unsuccoured, and stated that " the French general leaving his comrade in the lurch was bringing the curses of his country upon his head." Corroboration was added by the receipt of a telegram from London quoting the following remarkable extract from the *Paris Temps* :

MacMahon has suddenly made up his mind to go to the assistance of Bazaine, although to give up the approaches to Paris compromises the safety of France. The whole of the Army of Châlons has already left Rheims, but news received from Montmédy mentions nothing about the arrival of French troops.

The intelligence reached Moltke at a moment when he was seeking relaxation in his favourite game of whist ; but as everything had been provided for, it was merely a matter of securing the King's approval for the great right wheel to the north and of continuing the interrupted rubber. The orders issued late at night directed the Army of the Meuse to concentrate towards the right and to push northwards, followed by the Ist and IInd Bavarian Corps of the IIIrd Army. The Crown Prince on receiving news of the situation asked leave to accompany the movement a day later with the remainder of his army—a sound suggestion in which Moltke concurred. In persistent rain, hail, and storm the advance began next day and General Headquarters were transferred northward from Bar-le-Duc to Clermont.

In marked contradistinction to the French the Germans



made admirable use of their cavalry, and by the 27th four cavalry divisions formed an impenetrable cordon of a hundred squadrons in touch with the enemy from Vouziers to the Meuse. By this time MacMahon had given up the hope of effecting a passage over the river at Stenay and had determined to make an attempt farther north, so as to reach Montmédy by a detour; but by nightfall of the 27th even this modification seemed impossible, and the French commander was faced with the prospect of utter disaster. He knew by this time that Bazaine had not left Metz; he knew, too, that the Army of the Meuse had already recrossed that river and was barring the way to the fortress; he knew that the IIIrd Army was gathering on his track not less than 150,000 strong, and that his communications with Rheims were thus in serious jeopardy. In these circumstances the only rational course open seemed to be an immediate retreat on Mézières, with the object of eventually falling back on Paris; and late at night the necessary orders were issued, and the fact notified to the War Minister.

But neither the Minister nor the commander of the Army of Châlons was the controller of the French strategy, which had by now passed definitely into the hands of the Paris mob. From the capital came by telegraph during the night the most strenuous remonstrances: "If you leave Bazaine in the lurch a revolution will break out" ran the message, and in a second telegram the Ministry issued a peremptory order to relieve Metz. The troops in front of MacMahon, they said, were nothing more than a detachment from the army investing Metz; the Crown Prince was still several days' march in rear, and General Vinoy had already started from Rheims with the new French 13th Corps. Against his better judgment and fully aware that he was taking a most hazardous step the Marshal countermanded his orders, and directed his army to make a forced march on the 28th to the Meuse.

Success seemed out of the question and the Army of Châlons moved as if conscious of its doom. The weather had become rainy and inclement, and rapid marching was seriously impeded. Conflicting orders led to endless confusion. Discipline gave way, and the roads strewn with impedimenta and stragglers gave presage of coming disaster.

MacMahon decided to cross the Meuse not by Stenay and Mouzon, but lower down, partly because the enemy was close at hand, and partly because he had no bridging material to supplement the existing means of crossing. By the evening of the 29th his left wing was partly across and in comparative security, but the right wing was unsupported and exposed, and one corps had been sharply attacked by the Germans at Norrart. A great battle was now but a matter of time, for the Germans were closing in around their enemy. On the morning of the 30th the French 5th Corps was surprised at Beaumont and after fierce fighting driven northwards in disorder. The 7th Corps, which was making for the river lower down, was attacked in flank and rear and reached the Meuse only at nightfall, completely exhausted and in a state of disintegration.

These reverses clearly revealed to MacMahon that if his army were to be saved politics must be thrown overboard, and his course of action must be piloted by strategy and common sense. He decided definitely to renounce the advance on Metz and to withdraw his army in the hope of finding some support and opportunity of rest from the ramparts of an obsolete fourth-rate fortress. Next morning, August 31, the French assembled in and round Sedan.

MacMahon's sole hope lay in speed; but, curiously enough, he hugged the delusion that he might safely grant his troops one or two days' rest, and he even came to think that he might make a fresh bid to advance on Metz. Incredible as it now seems, a despatch was actually sent off to Paris announcing, "We are on the eve of victory." Moltke, however, made no mistake in dealing with the situation which Fortune had opened for him. All through August 31 the Germans were methodically working to surround Sedan under the eye of the Chief of the Staff, who watched the movement from a hill north of Sommauthe. Two corps of the Army of the Meuse—the Guard and XIIth—were sent across the Meuse to the right bank, and on the other bank the bulk of the IIIrd Army drew nearer and nearer the fortress. During the day Moltke rode to the Headquarters of that army, and rubbing his hands, a sardonic smile upon his face, exclaimed gleefully, "Now we have them in a rat-trap!" The

instructions for the IIIrd Army for the following day were issued verbally, but later a note came from Moltke to say that it would be better to attack somewhat earlier than had been arranged. Accordingly, the XIth and Vth Corps, in spite of their fatigue, were pushed forward during the night over the bridges at Donchery to make for the Sedan—Mézières road, the Württembergers crossing lower down, while a message was sent to the Crown Prince of Saxony asking him not to press his advance until the net should be closed.

Till 2 o'clock on the morning of September 1 Moltke was hard at work with his staff. Then, after a short sleep, he rode forward at 4 A.M. in a thick mist towards Donchery to select a site from which to watch the coming battle. His choice fell on a stubble field on an eminence south of the little village of Frénois, and about 8 o'clock he personally led King William to the spot. The mists were now breaking and the day, sunny and diamond clear, revealed a wide panorama of the country far ahead. Below flowed the river, and on the far side the position held by the French formed roughly a triangle resting on the right bank of the Meuse from near Bazeilles to Sedan and Glaire. Damming operations and the heavy rains of the previous days had spread the river over the low-lying meadows, and accordingly the French had deployed their forces almost wholly along the inner slopes of the Givonne brook and of the smaller stream which flows from the high land about Illy down to the village of Floing and thence to the Meuse. The heights of Illy, crowned by the Calvaire, formed the apex of the French position, while Floing and Bazeilles marked the left and right respectively.

When the King of Prussia reached the coign of vantage near Frénois the battle had already begun. To the right of the hill, batteries of the Ist Bavarian Corps were in action, and from a hollow still farther to the right a column of black smoke marked the burning village of Bazeilles. The main position of the French could be clearly seen and the advance of the two corps of the Army of the Meuse on the east could be made out, chiefly by the smoke rising from batteries successively coming into action and extending in a great semi-circle on the right. To the left, however, everything



was as yet perfectly still. Thus the morning wore away until about 11 o'clock a great pillar of smoke burst from the fortress, where a chance shot had set an oil factory on fire. By this time a brilliant assemblage had gathered on the hill; the King, Bismarck, Moltke, Roon, a crowd of princes, generals, aides-de-camp, and foreign military attachés, amongst whom was the American General Sheridan. The King stood, while others sat on a grassy ridge at the edge of the stubble. A large telescope had been set up on a stand, through which Moltke peered earnestly at intervals, referring every now and then to a large map which he held in his hand. At times he would move off to a short distance and stand abstractedly gazing at the panorama below, his right hand held to his cheek and his left hand supporting his right elbow in an attitude characteristic of him.

Shortly after 11 the German line of attack on the right bank of the Meuse was pushed farther so as to constrict the French within a narrower ring, and by this time the XIth and Vth Corps of the IIIrd Army, which had crossed the Meuse at Donchery, were pressing the French from the north-west. To Moltke and the observers on the hill it was clear that everything was taking place in accordance with the general instructions which had been issued and that the French were being gradually surrounded. The firing had now grown steadily in intensity and the noise of over a thousand guns, through which could be heard clearly the bark of the French *mitrailleuses*, was almost deafening at times. By 1 o'clock the German artillery was sweeping the larger half of the French position, although to the left there was still one small gap unenclosed.

Between 2 and 3 o'clock King William drew the attention of his staff to a movement of a considerable mass of the French on their extreme left, and declared that it was probably an attempt to break through. There were, in fact, columns of infantry advancing, but they soon retired, apparently finding that the gap in the German line was under accurate fire. Then was displayed to the observers on the hill one of the most thrilling spectacles of the war. A vigorous attack had been made by some seventeen battalions of the XIth and Vth Corps of the Germans, which had gradually

accumulated near Floing and were now climbing the steep slopes which led to the plateau to the eastward. In a hollow of the ground, unseen by the attacking infantry, but clearly visible, even with the naked eye, to the group in which Moltke stood, a mass of French cavalry was standing. This was Margueritte's Cavalry Division, to which the order had been sent to charge over the ground east of Floing and bring the enemy's attack to a standstill. In the self-sacrificing spirit which had characterized the French cavalry at Morsbronn three desperate charges were made, and the wild confusion in which the struggle surged backwards and forwards for half an hour on the western edge of the plateau was viewed by the King of Prussia and his staff in tense excitement. The King could not refrain from expressing aloud his high appreciation of the enemy's gallantry. But though the Prussian skirmishers were ridden down the supports stood firm, and the withering fire of the needle-gun mowed down the French horse, so that the ground over which they had charged seemed to the watchers like a great carpet, with a white and coloured pattern formed by bodies of grey horses and brilliant uniforms of Cuirassiers and Chasseurs d'Afrique.

The charge of the French cavalry cost them half their numbers but could not change the fate of the day. Although the Guard Corps of the Germans had a long march to make to come up on the right of the Army of the Meuse, the advanced troops occupied Givonne without much difficulty, and the Guard cavalry dashing up the valley had established connection with the IIIrd Army north of Illy early in the afternoon. The circle was now complete, but the Bois de Garenne still remained to be gained. A heavy concentrated fire of all the Guard batteries shelled the woods, and under cover of the cannonade the 1st Guard Division in the valley climbed the western heights shortly after 2 o'clock. A wild scene of confusion followed while the Guard and XIIth Corps pressed forward from the east, and from the north and west portions of the IIIrd Army kept closing in. The entry of the Guards into the battle had been anxiously awaited by Moltke, and he remained at the telescope searching for signs of their arrival. Suddenly he straightened himself up and

strode over to the King with the words, "The Guard Corps is getting to work. I congratulate your Majesty on one of the greatest victories of the century."

The battle was now in its last throes. From an early hour in the afternoon fugitives from the French army had been flocking into Sedan, and the desperate desire to gain the shelter of the walls led to a real demoralization in the French ranks. King William could see that the German artillery commanded the whole area in which the French army was hemmed. A concentrated fire appeared the best means of convincing the enemy of the hopelessness of further resistance, and accordingly at four o'clock he gave directions that the whole of the available artillery of the Bavarians on the left bank of the Meuse should concentrate upon Sedan. Very soon after the order had been put into effect flames burst forth in several places from the fortress. Not much later the French fire slackened, and then ceased altogether; and while the watchers on the hill-top were wondering what this lull portended, the smoke drifting away exposed to their eager gaze a white flag floating over the town.

Two staff officers were immediately sent down to the fortress to demand its surrender and that of the French army within it. In the lull which now reigned the King bade the company join him at luncheon, and there on the hill-top at Frénois the royal party regaled itself on "good bread, chops, and peas, with a bountiful supply of red and sherry wines,"<sup>1</sup> while the French Empire crumbled in the valley below—an anti-climax surely as great as the elders' dinner in Susanna. The question as to whether the French Emperor would be found within the net was eagerly discussed at this *al fresco* meal, but the general opinion was that such an event was unlikely. Bismarck expressed himself as frankly incredulous, exclaiming, "The old fox is too cunning to be caught in such a trap; by this he has slipped off to Paris."

The meal was scarcely over when excitement ran high as a Bavarian officer galloped up the hill with the message that the French at Torcy wished to capitulate, and that they were ready to surrender the fortress unconditionally. King William, however, was too sensible of the magnitude of the

<sup>1</sup> General Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*.



issue to allow a matter of this kind to be settled by subordinates, and replied that no one but himself must negotiate the affair and that a bearer of the flag of truce must be sent to him in person. The Crown Prince had by this ridden over from his own Headquarters, a short distance off, and the King and his son, Bismarck, Moltke and Roon gathered together in a group discussing the imminent surrender. The conference was suddenly interrupted by the return of one of the staff officers who had been sent down to the fortress, who now rode furiously up the hill shouting out that the French Emperor was within Sedan, and reported that Napoleon III. would send out a flag of truce immediately. Labouring under a strong emotion King William remarked to his Staff, "This is indeed a great success." Then, turning to his son, he said, "And I thank thee that thou hast contributed to it." With that he gave his hand to the Crown Prince, who kissed it, and to Moltke, who kissed it also.

About half-past six a guard of honour of cuirassiers appeared a little way off, and a French general, preceded by an orderly with a white flag, rode slowly up the hill and halted some hundreds of yards from the King. An officer from the escort rode forward to say that General Reille was the bearer of an autograph letter from the French Emperor to the King of Prussia. At this the King, followed by Bismarck, Moltke and Roon, walked to the front a short distance, and at a signal the envoy drew near, still riding, but when about a hundred yards off he dismounted and, uncovering, came the remaining distance on foot, holding high up in his right hand a letter. This he handed to King William, who took it, after saluting the bearer with military precision and punctilio. Opening the cover the King took out a single sheet of the Imperial notepaper, on which were half a dozen lines of writing. Amid profound silence the King of Prussia read out to those round him the message from his opponent.

MONSIEUR MON FRÈRE,

N'ayant pas pu mourir au milieu de mes troupes il ne me reste qu'à remettre mon épée entre les mains de Votre Majesté.

Je suis de Votre Majesté le bon Frère

NAPOLÉON.

SEDAN, le 1 Sept. 1870.

The reading finished, the King conferred with his three counsellors. The sword of Napoleon was not, however, what Moltke had striven for, and accordingly the King dictated a dignified reply, in which, while regretting the circumstances in which he and the French Emperor met, he requested Napoleon to name an officer to treat for the capitulation of the army which had fought so bravely. General von Moltke, the note went on to say, would represent the German side. Shortly before seven o'clock the French general rode back to Sedan with the message for his master, and the King, mounting his horse, made his way back to Vendresse. The fortress was still blazing in three places, and a pillar of smoke rising from Bazeilles showed that the conflagration there was still raging. Save for these signs the tragedy of Sedan was over, and the curtain of night fell upon the scene.

Moltke's work was not yet done. Late at night a momentous session was held in Donchery, the little town which commands a bridge over the Meuse. There General de Wimpffen, having succeeded to the command of the Army of Châlons in the place of MacMahon, who had been wounded during the battle, attended as the plenipotentiary of Napoleon III. to hear the terms imposed by the victorious Germans. On one side of a square table sat Moltke with the Quartermaster-General on his right hand, and opposite to him sat de Wimpffen alone. Bismarck, too, was present, and other officers, both German and French, made up the scene. The conference opened in silence, broken by a request from the French general to be informed of the conditions to be imposed. Moltke stated the matter plainly—the whole French army in Sedan must surrender as prisoners of war.

The unfortunate de Wimpffen pleaded for moderation and expressed his intention of continuing the struggle rather than submit to such terms, but Moltke coldly reminded him that further resistance was impossible—"You have no supplies: your ammunition is exhausted: your army is decimated." The Frenchman then appealed to Moltke as a fellow-soldier, and asked for his sympathy for an officer who had just arrived from Africa to take over command during a disastrous battle and found himself obliged to

listen to the conditions laid down by the conqueror. Moltke, however, was not to be moved. The discussion then took on a political tone, de Wimpffen urging that honourable conditions would assuage the sting of defeat whereas vigorous measures would promote perpetual bad blood between France and Prussia. But in a discussion of this kind the general was no match for the diplomatist Bismarck, who needed no instructions as to how to play a winning hand. The Chancellor did not mince his words, and de Wimpffen, stung into resolution, declared that the battle would be renewed. "The armistice expires at four o'clock to-morrow morning," broke in Moltke, "and at that hour precisely I shall open fire."

All had risen to their feet, and for a moment no one spoke. But Bismarck intervened and begged Moltke to point out again how impossible the French resistance had become. The conference was resumed and Moltke proceeded with his demonstrations afresh. "Your positions," said de Wimpffen, "are not as strong as you would have me believe." "You do not know the topography of the country round Sedan," was Moltke's crushing reply. "Here is a remarkable detail which illustrates the presumption of your people," he went on, thoroughly aroused. "When the war began, you supplied your officers with maps of Germany at a time when they could not study the geography of their own country for want of French maps. I tell you that our positions are not only strong, they are inexpugnable." De Wimpffen, unable to reply, wished to accept an offer made, but not accepted, some time earlier, that a French officer should be conducted round the German positions to verify these assertions. "You will not send anybody," exclaimed Moltke. "It is useless and you can believe my word. Besides, you have not long to reflect. It is now midnight. The truce ends at four o'clock. I will grant no delay." Driven to his last ditch the Frenchman pleaded for time to consult his fellow generals and asked for twenty-four hours' grace. This request was abruptly refused by Moltke, but in the end, at the instigation of Bismarck, the final limit of time was fixed for nine o'clock in the morning. At 1 A.M. the conference broke up, and de Wimpffen with his seconds



rode back to Sedan. The German Headquarters Staff, however, did not propose to accede to any possible request for modification of terms, and during the night proceeded to draw up the text of the capitulation.

The confidence was not unjustified. During the morning the document was signed by Moltke for the Germans and de Wimpffen for the French. The whole of the Army of Châlons became prisoners of war, the number of prisoners by capitulation exceeding 83,000. In addition, on the French side some 3000 had been killed, 14,000 wounded, and 21,000 taken during the battle. Of the whole French force merely a few hundreds more or less had broken out and got away. Among the trophies and material taken were one eagle, two colours, and 419 field-guns and *mitrailleuses*. On the day after the surrender the French soldiers were marched into the peninsula formed by the deep loop of the Meuse to be sent by successive batches to Germany, and on September 3 the broken Emperor departed for the residence designated for him at Wilhelmshöhe, near Cassel.

Before the next stage of the war began, King William took the occasion afforded by a banquet at the Headquarters at Vendresse to express his thanks to his three helpers for the share each had taken in the achievement of German unity. He asked his guests to drink the following toast, "We must to-day, out of gratitude, drink the health of my brave army. You, General von Roon, as Minister of War, whetted our sword; you, General von Moltke, wielded it; and you, Count von Bismarck, have brought Prussia to its present pre-eminence by the way in which you have directed its policy for several years. Let us therefore drink to the well-being of this army, of the three persons I have named, and of every one else who has contributed to our successes up to the present to the best of his ability."

Though Moltke had been present throughout the whole day at the battle of Sedan there had been no occasion for him to act otherwise than as a spectator, or as an adviser to the King when the surrender of the French army was in question. No written orders of great import were issued from the hill of Frénois during the fight, and, practically speaking, the operations consisted merely in carrying out

the directives issued on August 30. Tactically, therefore, so far as Moltke is concerned, the battle calls for little comment. Outgeneralled, outnumbered, outmanœuvred, outfought—outmatched in everything except courage, the French army was simply crushed by a circle of fire, and although there were, at times, moments of anxiety at German Headquarters, it was anxiety far more that the French might slip away than that they could possibly inflict defeat upon their opponents.

The very completeness of the tactical victory is, however, apt to overshadow the strategic difficulties which preceded it, and tends to rob Moltke of the credit to which he is entitled for the operations of which Sedan was the culminating point. When Bazaine retired behind the shelter of Metz, it needed considerable boldness to decide at once upon a further advance while Thionville, Metz, Toul, Verdun and Strasburg still held out, and the second of these fortresses blocked one railway communication with Germany and also contained a large army which might break out at any moment. It is true that immediately after the battle of Borny on August 14 the work had been put in hand of running a field railway from Remilly to Pont-à-Mousson, so as to unite Saarbrücken with the line to Châlons, but the work was slow and Toul was a further obstacle. Moltke's determination not to waste time by delay is all the more creditable when it is remembered that political considerations were for the moment opposed to those of strategy. Bismarck, indeed, foresaw and dreaded the prospect of revolution in France, and was half in favour of a peace to be brought about by the abdication of Napoleon III. and the moulding of the Prince Imperial into a tool of Prussia. Moltke, however, was not to be turned from what he considered the true military path. He knew how to deal with Bismarck, and luckily for Germany he was the one man in the Fatherland whom Bismarck could neither frighten, humble, cajole nor ruin.

Even though the resolve to push on westward with the forces remaining after providing for the investment of Metz may appear to have an element of rashness, Moltke's handling of the subsequent situation showed his characteristic caution. So long as the flank movement of MacMahon

appeared improbable, the orders to the IIIrd Army and the Army of the Meuse were such as to ensure that the two wings should be prepared for any eventuality. When, however, the relief of Bazaine seemed possible, the orders issued prepared the two armies for a conversion to the right. Finally, when trustworthy information was received, the troops started on their northward march. Moltke's successive directives during August 23 to 26 reveal a step-by-step surrender of preconceived ideas to the claims of probability, and his conduct during those days forms a striking example of the application of his motto, *Erst wägen, dann wagen*.

If the completeness of the victory at Sedan has tended to obscure the admirably conceived strategy by which alone success was rendered possible, it is not less true to say that the great operation of changing the direction of the German armies is apt to be overlooked from the same cause. It was, in fact, an extraordinarily brilliant feat of administration. To execute such an immense change of front at such short notice, necessitating the most exact arrangements for the huge columns in the woods and defiles of the Argonne, forms a striking proof of the excellence of Prussian organization. To what extent the credit of such a high level of efficiency was due to Moltke is not easy to estimate, but the seeds of success attending great movements in the field are sown in the staff rides of the days of peace training. As Chief of the Staff, Moltke exercised a telling influence on the conduct of these practical exercises, and the fine staff work exhibited in the great right wheel must, at any rate, be attributed in part to him.

It has been claimed that Bazaine was Moltke's best friend; but this is to do an injustice to the Marshal. The most valuable assistant Moltke had in France was the French press. To a generation inured to the stringent restrictions on journalism rendered necessary by war—and loyally accepted by press and public—the blazing indiscretions of the French newspapers in 1870 come almost as a shock. The extract from the *Temps*, which meant so much to Moltke, has already been referred to, and, unfortunately for France, it was noised far and wide. On August 26, 1870, the *Times*, in an article, "The Raising of the Camp at



Châlons," cites a letter dated the 23rd from the correspondent of the *Temps*, in which MacMahon is quoted as saying: "To leave the road to Paris open would mean risking the safety of France; but how can we abandon the nucleus of our forces, and what responsibility would be attributed to me by those who deem me capable of envy, if I did not go to the assistance of Bazaine?" A week before Sedan, MacMahon's movements were known not only to Moltke, but to every military student in Europe. One, at least, was so convinced of the certain result that he telegraphed to a friend, "That army is lost."<sup>1</sup>

The envelopment of the Army of Châlons by the Germans at the battle of Sedan has been hailed by one German critic as a triumph of the German strategical doctrine over that of the French,<sup>2</sup> and he celebrates the triumph in no unmeasured terms. "At last," he wrote, "a battle fought under conditions similar to those of Cannae had led to the total envelopment of the enemy, and Moltke had succeeded where Frederick the Great and Napoleon had failed owing to their neglect to exploit to the full the Hannibalic principles of war." But, beyond the fact that the Germans attacked over a wide front while MacMahon concentrated his army, there is little to justify the deduction as to the comparative values of the two strategic schools. By September 1 the situation was no longer a test between two systems; and it was no scientific duel between an army concentrated in depth against another formed in a long battle line that was witnessed at Sedan. It was merely the struggle of one army, hopelessly overmatched, to save itself from the grip of an adversary superior in every point. As Moltke justly said, the Army of Châlons was "in a rat-trap"; but it had been forced into such a position less by the inferiority of any strategic system than by the insistent claims of politics, the worthlessness of its composition, and the betrayal of its movements by its own countrymen.

<sup>1</sup> W. O'Connor Morris, *Moltke*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Von Schlieffen, *Cannae*, p. 33.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—THE GERMAN ADVANCE ON PARIS—FALL OF METZ

THE French 13th Corps had escaped the catastrophe at Sedan, and had skilfully retreated from Mézières to Paris. Except for this body, the power of resistance of France after September 1 depended almost entirely upon her fortresses. Only five of the less important of these strong places had as yet fallen, including Sedan; and the existence of the fortresses which still held out—Metz, Strasburg, Bitsch, Pfalzburg, Toul, Verdun and Thionville—had a throttling effect upon the German communications. Moltke, however, was convinced that the real decision of the war must be sought under the walls of Paris. Even before the war he had always attributed a peculiar importance to the French capital. His long study of strategy had, of course, brought home to him that the mere fact of the capitals of Great Powers—Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, Madrid—falling into the victor's hands had not in the past invariably implied the conclusion of the struggle. The influence of Paris in France had, however, in former wars proved to be a commanding one—so commanding that with its fall the war also had come to an end in 1814 and 1815. To Moltke, and indeed to German Headquarters generally, the march on Paris seemed such an evident necessity that no other plan was seriously put forward, and orders were issued accordingly for the IIIrd Army and the Army of the Meuse—less two corps told off to guard the French prisoners of Sedan—to bend their steps towards the capital.

So soon as the battle of Sedan had been won, it was settled at German Headquarters that peace would not be

made without the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. Bismarck has stated that his own policy would have stopped at the acquisition of Strasburg. Moltke, however, pronounced that Germany could not be secure against invasion while Metz remained in the hands of France, and backed up by the army commanders and higher Staff, who distrusted Bismarck's military judgment, he was able to win over King William, who as a soldier was likely to be profoundly influenced by purely military considerations. For a moment it seemed as if peace even on these terms might be secured, but such hopes were dissipated by the refusal of France to part with an inch of her soil or a stone of her fortresses, and the march upon Paris was resumed without loss of time.

The wisdom of the decision taken by Moltke has been severely criticized. The advance on Paris after Sedan has, indeed, been called "the greatest of all his mistakes,"<sup>1</sup> and the writer who uttered this judgment commented severely upon the fact that Moltke thrust himself into the heart of France at the head of 150,000 men, with the Army of the Rhine at Metz on his communications—imprisoned no doubt, but still a danger; with his retreat to Germany almost closed; with a gigantic fortress in his immediate front; and with a great nation that might rise up in arms against him. The last circumstance, however, is one which seems not merely to have justified, but actually to have clamoured for, just such action as Moltke took. The organization required to develop the immense resources of France was to a great extent centralized in Paris; and, that such centralized organization should have the fullest play, two factors were vital for it—freedom of communication with the rest of the country, and *time*. The best way to check any possibility of the resurrection of France was, therefore, to seize Paris, but, should this be impracticable, then to isolate it as thoroughly and as rapidly as possible. Later, when, contrary to the expectations of Moltke, the war became more and more prolonged and the hardships of a winter campaign were keenly felt, a reversion of opinion began to make itself felt; and even in German circles the advance on Paris was decried as a mistake. The view was put forward that the German

<sup>1</sup> W. O'Connor Morris, *Moltke*, p. 403.



armies should have stood fast after Sedan and waited for an attempt on the part of the French to take the offensive and drive the invaders from the country. But in every struggle, especially when a brilliant opening phase is succeeded by a deadlock, a marked reaction against offensive warfare makes itself felt, and the importance of retaining the initiative unchecked is overlooked. Fortunately for his country Moltke was immune from such a heresy, and during the siege of Paris he once remarked, "If, with the experience we have now, we were again placed in the position we were in after Sedan, I would propose to the King no other plan than an advance on Paris."

Such difficulty as beset the Germans at the time was, however, political rather than military. The disasters to France had brought about an upheaval in the country, and even a week before Sedan the Empire had practically ceased to exist. Lord Lyons wrote to his Government, "I do not know if even the news of a victory would save the dynasty." The authorities had made a futile attempt to suppress all information, but at last on September 3 came the news of the catastrophe of Sedan. With the Emperor and his entire army prisoners in the enemy's hands the continuation of the dynasty was obviously impossible. The remnants of Imperial rule were swept away by the tidal wave of public opinion, and the Republic was hastily erected in its place. At German Headquarters there was considerable perplexity as to who, or what, was now France, and Bismarck in his tentative peace negotiations hesitated to treat the holders of office in Paris as an established Government. Paris, however, was still the capital and the heart of the country, and Moltke had diagnosed pretty clearly that it was there that the telling blow should be administered.

The march on Paris began on September 4, and on the 19th the German army, marching with its front covered by the cavalry divisions, arrived before the city and took up positions forming a complete circle of investment. The general strategic situation had taken on an aspect serious from the French point of view, for Bazaine had failed in an attempt to break out of Metz on August 31. To the Army of the Meuse was assigned the northern semi-circle of Paris,

while the IIIrd Army took over charge of the southern half. An outer protective ring was formed by the cavalry, and General Headquarters were located at Versailles. During the day an interview took place between Favre and Bismarck, but though the latter was willing to grant an armistice for the purpose of electing a National Assembly with which Germany could treat for peace, he required as a condition of the armistice that Toul and Strasburg should be surrendered. These conditions were rejected as insulting to France, and the war was left to take its course.

At this time Moltke was convinced that the siege of Paris would not be prolonged, and writing to his brother Adolf on September 22 he expressed his private hope that he would be shooting hares at Creisau by the end of October. His real dislike for France had the effect of preventing him from realizing the efforts of which she was still capable. "*La France*," he wrote in the same letter, "*qui est plus forte que jamais* even under these circumstances talks big as usual. An army in the field has ceased to exist, but they still have M. Rochefort, *professeur de barricades*, and *la poitrine des patriotes invincibles*." He speaks sneeringly of Favre,<sup>1</sup> and with somewhat mordant irony he depicts a few features of Paris: "Gas-lighting ceases from to-day; water is only to be had at fixed hours: all the railways are interrupted. The Bois de Boulogne is full of beasts for slaughter, and from our position at Meudon and St. Cloud we could fire upon them at any moment. The promenades of the *beau* and the *demi-monde* have ceased, and the Parisians have had no milk to-day in their coffee. How long they can hold out remains to be seen." Moltke had, indeed, apparently made up his mind that the date when they would cease to hold out was not far off, but it is impossible from his letter, reading between the lines, to escape the impression that the wish was

<sup>1</sup> Less so, however, than Blumenthal, Chief of the Staff of the IIIrd Army. "When we were with the VIth Corps to-day, I learnt that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jules Favre, had been there, and that he had been graciously received and at that very moment was in conference somewhere with Bismarck. I was boiling with indignation, and am sure that I could not have brought myself to discuss affairs with such a rank democrat who had made himself Minister. At the most I should have sent my servants to interview him."—*Journal*, English translation, p. 130.

father to the thought. A sense of war-weariness is evident. He dwells wistfully upon the prospect of his country-house at Creisau. "If possible I would join you," he says, "for such a campaign severely tries the strength of a man with seventy years on his shoulders as I have." But the thought of his dead and dearly loved wife, and the memories awakened by an ivy leaf plucked from the chapel where she lay, renewed his energy—"If only Marie had lived to see these times! But I believe that departed souls do not lose their cognizance of earthly things and that her patriotic heart sympathizes with us all."

Inside the besieged city, on the same day that Moltke penned his letter, the fiery soul of Gambetta was breathing the spirit of Danton into an appeal for resistance to the death.

"On this day," he wrote, "seventy-eight years ago our fathers founded the Republic, and, while the foreign invader was profaning the sacred soul of their country, vowed to live free or die fighting. They kept their vow, they defeated the foreigner; and the Republic of 1792 lives in the memory of men as the symbol of heroism and national greatness. . . . May the spirit of power that inspired our forefathers breathe into our own souls, and we too shall conquer."

And thus was begun the splendid but unequal struggle between the two men of the war who have merited the designation of makers of their century.

On September 27 Paris was definitely cut off, except for the communication afforded by balloon, carrier-pigeons, and spies, from communication with the outer world. Two days earlier a telegraph cable had been discovered in the Seine, and messages passing between Tours and the capital had been tapped. The greater part of these were, however, in cypher, of which the German authorities did not possess the key, and accordingly, by Moltke's orders, the cable was destroyed. Before the month was out Strasburg fell, thus setting free the army of General Werder—now raised to the strength of a corps and numbered the XIVth—by which it had been besieged, and enabling that force to provide a badly needed protection for the main German line of communication.



On the French side all men of military age had been called to arms, and troops began to be raised and organized at the headquarters of the four provincial commands—Lille, Le Mans, Bourges and Besançon. Scattered over the country were a number of fourth battalions and depot companies and mobile national guards, except those which had been sent to Paris. In addition there were the conscripts of the 1870 class, a large number of old ex-soldiers, and a few regular regiments recalled from Algeria. The great difficulty in forming and organizing new units from this mass of chiefly untrained personnel was the lack of regular officers ; and thus, although at the stamp of France's foot armies sprang from the ground, they were armies rather in being than in fact. By the end of September the following forces were in the field. In the Loire district was the newly formed 15th Corps, approximately 60,000 strong, composed of depot troops and Gardes Mobiles, and of inferior military value. In north-west France the Territorial commander, Fiereck, was assembling battalions of Gardes Mobiles. General Gudin with 14,000 armed men was at Rouen and Elbœuf ; and another force of 4000 protected the railway communications between Rouen and the south. In the south-east General Cambriels was organizing an army at Besançon for the protection of Lyons. As for the organized government of the country the head remained in Paris, but a delegation of three members of the ministry, with the aged lawyer Crémieux at their head, had set out for Tours to act as delegates to the provinces. The leader, however, proved unfitted for his task ; his authority was disputed, and revolutionary movements threatened to baulk the salvation of France. A stronger hand and will were wanted, and on October 7 Gambetta left Paris by balloon to undertake the government of the provinces and the organization of the national armies.

On the 9th Gambetta arrived at Tours and assumed the powers of a dictator. Assisted by de Freycinet, a civil engineer of considerable ability but without military experience, he worked marvels in the rapid organization of the new armies. Eleven new army corps were created one after another. New batteries were put into the field at the

rate of eleven a week. New chassepots were manufactured at the rate of a thousand a day. The shells for the field artillery were improved. Small-arm ammunition was turned out from every factory that could make it ; while, in addition to the manufacturing resources of France, the factories of England and America were able to lend their aid, thanks to the maritime command which France still possessed. Trained officers, however, were but few, for the bulk of them were either prisoners of war in Germany, or beleaguered in Metz, Paris, Belfort and other fortresses.

The formation of the new armies of France could not be allowed by the Germans to proceed unchecked, even though the sieges of Metz and Paris were imposing on the German armies a virtual immobility. Early in October the movements of newly formed French levies began to attract attention, and German cavalry detachments exploring southwards found that French troops were gathering on the Loire. The Chief of Staff of the IIIrd Army—which, as has been stated, was watching the southern sector of Paris—approached Moltke on the 6th, and proposed that a force consisting of the Ist Bavarian Corps, the 22nd Division, and three cavalry divisions should move against the French army of the south and “give it a sound drubbing.” By this time the two corps left at Sedan to guard prisoners had arrived at Paris ; Moltke at once assented to Blumenthal’s plan, and the force moved southwards under General von der Tann, who chased a French division out of Artenay on the 10th, drove the 15th Corps southwards next day in the first battle of Orleans, and laid siege to Orleans itself. Tann was then directed to cross the Loire and destroy the arsenals at Bourges, but on his reporting that this task was beyond his powers, Moltke ordered Werder with the army of Strasbourg to move westwards against Bourges, after dispersing the weak forces that were gathering about Besançon.

But before Werder had proceeded far on his way the situation had undergone a change of immense improvement to the German prospects. On the 28th there arrived at German Headquarters at Versailles official intelligence of the capitulation of Metz and Marshal Bazaine’s army. Three marshals of France, 6000 officers and 173,000 men were

prisoners of war—practically the whole of the regular army of France was now captive ; 200,000 victorious invaders were set free to attack the still untrained levies of France ; and a serious obstacle on the German communications was removed.

“ Before these lines can reach you,” wrote Moltke to his brother Adolf on the 27th, “ the telegraph will have announced the great news, and 101 guns from the Lustgarten will proclaim it to Berlin. 150,000 more Frenchmen will be made prisoners, and the strong fortress of Metz falls into our hands. Nothing of the kind has been seen in the world since the Babylonish captivity. We need an army now to guard our 300,000 prisoners.

“ France has no longer an army, and yet we must wait till the Parisians, who are raving in delirium, give up this hopeless resistance. I do not wish to be in a hurry to adopt the last cruel alternative of a regular bombardment.

“ The sorties, so far, have been wrecked on our outposts ; they have never got so far as our main positions. But pursuit on our part is out of the question, and we are losing men daily from the fire from the forts, which fire haphazard, with an incredible waste of ammunition, at a range of 8000 paces. And with 60 to 100 rounds they kill 3, 5, or 20 of our men, as chance may direct.

“ Every attempt at relief from outside has been defeated and dispersed, but the Government still spurs on the hapless population in the provinces, by lying reports and patriotic bombast, to make fresh efforts, which have to be suppressed by the destruction of whole towns. The audacity of the *francs tireurs* must be punished by severe reprisals, and the war is assuming a horrible aspect. It is bad enough when armies have to tear each other to pieces ; but to set nations against each other is not an advance, but a lapse into barbarism. How little a rising of the masses, even of so brave a race as this, can do against a small but disciplined force should be seen with all its consequences by our liberals, who preach the arming of the people.

“ So long as there is no real authority in France, recognized by the nation, we have no alternative but to continue the devastation of war to a still increasing extent.”

But neither the capture of Metz nor the prospect of a new and terrible campaign could ruffle the characteristic calmness of the man most nearly concerned. Less than a week after the fall of Metz, in writing to a neighbour at Creisau, Moltke laconically summed up the French losses



to date as "300,000 men, 10,000 officers, 4 marshals, and 1 emperor." Of the letter merely one-third deals with the war, while the remainder is devoted to minute inquiry and instructions about his country estate. He is glad that the harvest ended so satisfactorily in spite of the weather. His eagerness for economy leads to the remark: "A diminution of the stock of sheep with an increase in cattle will be an improvement, for although the wool paid well and was an agreeable source of income the new arrangement will save us a considerable expense in manure." The hares may now be shot by a sporting doctor neighbour, "as I, myself, cannot hope to return this autumn," and lastly—*ruat coelum*—"the gardener's boy William is to have his wages increased."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR (*continued*)—FROM THE FALL OF METZ TO THE END OF THE WAR

THE surrender of Metz fatally changed the conditions of the French war of national defence. Of the two German armies set free by the fall of the fortress, the I<sup>st</sup> under Manteuffel—less one corps left to garrison Metz and to lay siege to Thionville and Montmédy, and another corps, the II<sup>nd</sup>, sent to Paris—took the direction of Compiègne on the Oise to operate in the north of France, while the II<sup>nd</sup> Army under Prince Frederick Charles advanced south-west. Aware that Prince Frederick Charles was moving towards the Loire, Gambetta insisted that d'Aurelle de Paladines should advance upon Orleans with the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Corps, the idea being to recapture the city, and to transform it into an entrenched camp which should form the base of future operations for the relief of Paris. The French general with greatly superior numbers<sup>1</sup> attacked Tann at Coulmiers on November 9, defeated him and reoccupied Orleans, thus gaining the first real success achieved by the French during the war. The two French corps were joined towards the end of November by the 17<sup>th</sup> from Le Mans, the 18<sup>th</sup> from Nevers and the 20<sup>th</sup> from the south-east, so that the French had then about Orleans over 180,000 men.

At German Headquarters at Versailles the result of the battle of Coulmiers had caused some uneasiness: the possibility of a failure of the siege was discussed: 40,000 troops were sent southwards in haste to the support of the Bavarian general; and Prince Frederick Charles, who had

<sup>1</sup> The French had 72,000 infantry, 7200 cavalry, and 160 guns against 14,500 infantry, 4500 cavalry, and 100 guns.

reached Troyes, was ordered to move to the Paris—Orleans road. D'Aurelle, however, did not move upon the capital : his troops were still unfit for the enterprise ; and he remained stationary to the north of Orleans in order to improve his organization, to await reinforcements and to meet the attack of Frederick Charles in a strong position. In the third week of November the leading divisions of the German II<sup>nd</sup> Army approached and took post between Orleans and Paris. Gambetta now insisted that the effort should be made to relieve the capital. D'Aurelle resisted, considering that a march on Paris would have been a " mad attempt," but was forced to obey. The garrison of Paris had already made several unsuccessful attacks upon the lines of their besiegers—the most vigorous being that of Le Bourget on October 30 in which bayonets were crossed—and it was now arranged that in the last days of November General Trochu should endeavour to break out on the southern side, while the Army of the Loire should simultaneously fall upon the enemy in front of it and endeavour to force its way to the capital. On the 28th the attack upon the Germans to the north of Orleans began, and led to the action of Beaune-la-Rolande, in which some 20,000 Germans repulsed a brave but disjointed attack by double the number of French. A vigorous offensive was now ordered by Moltke, with the result that on December 5 Orleans passed back into the hands of the Germans, and thus befell—in the words of de Freycinet—" the greatest disaster of the second period of the war, the disaster that decided the fate of France."

Nor did Fortune smile upon the efforts of France in the capital or the north. The sortie from Paris, which began with a successful attack by General Ducrot upon Champigny beyond the Marne, ended after some days of combat in the recovery by the Germans of the positions which they had lost, and in the retreat of Ducrot into Paris. In the same week Manteuffel, moving against the French Army of the North, encountered it near Amiens, defeated it after a hard struggle, and gained possession of Amiens itself. The month which had succeeded the fall of Metz had, therefore, rendered the victory of France more unlikely than ever.

Leaving a brigade at Amiens, Manteuffel moved upon



Rouen, which fell into his hands without resistance, and pressed on westwards to Dieppe. After the battle of Amiens the French troops of the north had been put under General Faidherbe, who had just returned from Algeria, and under his energetic command they advanced again upon Amiens, but were defeated on December 23 and driven back to Arras. Little more than a week after his first effort Faidherbe made a fresh attempt, his objective being the relief of Peronne, which had been besieged since December 27. On January 3 he fell upon a German division at Bapaume and handled it severely, but was eventually compelled to retire on Arras once again and to abandon the relief of Peronne, which place fell a week later. After some days' rest, in response to a telegram from de Freycinet to co-operate with a projected sortie from Paris, Faidherbe made an attempt against the German communications, advancing this time by the eastward line through St. Quentin with the object of striking at and destroying the Rheims railway. In front of St. Quentin Goeben attacked him. Faidherbe's army was compelled to retreat northwards in disorder, and its part in the war was at an end.

When the Germans recaptured Orleans on December 5 the Army of the Loire had been cut in two. The 15th, 18th and 20th Corps retreated south of the river, while the 16th and 17th, also in retreat, remained on the right bank. From these scattered forces the Delegation formed two armies, giving the command of one to Bourbaki and the other to Chanzy. At German Headquarters it was expected that Bourbaki would soon reappear at Orleans from the east and endeavour to combine with Chanzy's troops. Gambetta, however, had been won over to a plan put forward by de Freycinet to move the army of Bourbaki to the east of France by rail, with the object of raising the siege of Belfort and cutting the enemy's lines of communication. But Gambetta miscalculated the power of young untrained troops, imperfectly armed and badly fed, and the central position of Prince Frederick Charles enabled him to act on interior lines. It was resolved at German Headquarters to advance against Chanzy's army and finally destroy it, and in a series of hard-fought struggles he was driven back at the

beginning of January from Vendôme to Le Mans. On the 12th Chanzy took post before that town, but, while he was making a vigorous resistance in the centre of the line, the Breton regiments stationed on his right gave way, and the Germans pressed round him, gaining possession of the town. Chanzy retreated towards Laval, leaving thousands of prisoners in the hands of the enemy and saving only the debris of an army.

Bourbaki in the meantime, in spite of a break-down of railway and telegraph arrangements from over-pressure, contrived by January 1, 1871, to place the 18th and 20th Corps—70,000 men and 150 guns but without transport—between Auxonne and Dôle. The 24th Corps joined them there from Lyons with 30,000 more, and about the same number from the 16th Corps were *en route*. At Dijon and Autun were divisions, that round the former town being commanded by Garibaldi. On January 3 Bourbaki advanced against Werder, who had about 30,000 men between Vesoul and Villersexel and as many more before Belfort. The report of his eastward movement was not at first believed at German Headquarters, and the XIVth Corps of General Werder, which had been engaged about Dijon with the body of auxiliaries commanded by Garibaldi, was left to bear the brunt of the attack without support. When the real state of affairs became known Manteuffel was appointed to command the "Southern Army," consisting of Werder's XIVth Corps, the IIInd Corps from Montargis and the VIIth from Mézières, and was sent eastwards in hot haste towards the threatened point. Werder meanwhile had evacuated Dijon and fallen back upon Vesoul, while part of his army was still occupied in the siege of Belfort. As Bourbaki approached he fell back through Lure into the Rhine valley, still keeping his hold, however, on Villersexel.

Here Bourbaki, with forces outnumbering those opposing them by more than three to one, threw the enemy back after one of the fiercest battles of the war. Unable, however, to profit by his success, he gave Werder time to occupy the strong positions that he had chosen behind the Lisaine about Montbéliard and covering Belfort. On January 15 began a struggle which lasted for three days. The French,

starving and perishing with cold—the temperature had fallen to zero (F.)—though far superior in numbers to their enemy, were led with little effect against the German entrenchments. Bourbaki began his retreat on the 18th, and reached Besançon on the 23rd. Werder was unable to follow him: Manteuffel was still at some distance; and for a moment it seemed possible that Bourbaki, by a rapid movement westwards, might crush this isolated foe. Gambetta ordered Bourbaki to make the attempt; that commander refused to court further disaster with troops who were not fit to face an enemy, and retreated towards Pontarlier on the 27th in the hope of making his way to Lyons. Manteuffel now descended in front of him: divisions of Werder's army pressed down from the north: the retreat was cut off; and the unfortunate French general, whom a telegram from Gambetta removed from his command, attempted to take his own life. The retreat was resumed by his successor Clinchant, and the French army, floundering knee-deep through the pitiless snows of the Jura mountains, reached Pontarlier. Excluded from the scope of the armistice, which was signed on the 28th, the wreck of Bourbaki's army, still numbering more than 85,000 men, but reduced to the extremity of weakness and misery, sought refuge beyond the Swiss frontier.

During December preparations had been made by the Germans for the bombardment of Paris, and on the 27th, while the forts were subjected to a cannonade, the city itself came under fire. Public opinion in Germany had been strongly in favour of employing this method of compelling the surrender of the capital, although Moltke himself had been averse from it. Writing to his brother Adolf five days before the bombardment took place, he thus expressed himself:

The universal longing for this terrible war to end makes those at home forget that it has been going on only five months. They hope everything from a bombardment of Paris. That this has not yet been done they attribute to a delicate consideration for the Parisians, if not to the influence of personages in high places, while we only think of what is practical and possible from a military point of view. I have had this verse sent me by three separate correspondents:



Guter Moltke gehst so stumm  
Immer um das Ding herum ;  
Bester Moltke sei nicht dumm,  
Mach doch endlich Bum, Bum, Bum !

What it means to attack a fortress in which an army lies ready to defend it might have been learnt from Sebastopol. . . . To bombard Paris we should first have to hold the forts. Nothing has been omitted towards the employment of this forcible measure ; but I look for far greater results from a slower but surer agent—hunger.

The bombardment of Paris caused the French Government, against the judgment of its military advisers, to yield to the popular clamour for a fresh sortie. Faidherbe was asked to give what help he could, but he was defeated at St. Quentin on the day on which took place the last unsuccessful sortie from Paris. There now remained provisions only for another fortnight ; above forty thousand of the inhabitants had succumbed to the privations of the siege. All hope of assistance from the relieving armies, before actual famine should begin, disappeared. On January 23 Favre sought the German Chancellor at Versailles in order to discuss the conditions of a general armistice and of the capitulation of Paris. The negotiations lasted for several days ; but on the 28th an armistice was signed with the declared object that elections might at once be freely held for a National Assembly, which should decide whether the war should be continued, or on what conditions peace should be made. The conditions of the armistice were that the forts of Paris and all their material of war should be handed over to the German army ; that the artillery of the enceinte should be dismounted ; and that the regular troops in Paris should, as prisoners of war, surrender their arms. The National Guard was permitted to retain its weapons and its artillery. Immediately upon the fulfilment of the first two conditions all facilities were to be given for the entry of supplies of food into Paris. The armistice did not, however, apply to the Departments of Doubs, Jura, and Côte d'Or, nor to the fortress of Belfort. The defence of that fortress was therefore continued until February 5, on which date Colonel Denfert-Rochereau received explicit orders to surrender the place and marched out with the honours of war.

The articles of the armistice were duly executed, and on January 30 the Prussian flag waved over the forts of the French capital. Immediately on the expiration of the armistice, on February 21, negotiations for peace took place, in which Moltke and the Emperor stood out for Metz as part of the territorial cession of Alsace and Lorraine, although Bismarck and the Crown Prince were disposed to leave the fortress in French hands if dismantled. Thiers strove hard for the retention of Belfort ; and after consulting Moltke, Bismarck gave the French negotiator the choice between allowing the Germans a military entry into Paris and yielding the fortress. Thiers resolved at once to save Belfort, and on February 26 preliminaries of peace were signed. Three days later 30,000 German soldiers marched under the Arc de Triomphe, and on the same day the preliminary treaty was ratified by the Assembly at Bordeaux. By this France lost Alsace and Lorraine, with Strasburg and Metz—worth in Moltke's opinion two army corps—and had to submit to the imposition of an indemnity of £200,000,000, and to the occupation of French territory till the last franc had been paid. On May 10, 1871, the definitive Treaty of Peace was signed at Frankfort.

In reviewing the war as a whole it is usual to divide it into two distinct phases, the battle of Sedan being taken as the conclusion of the first period ; but a more suitable point of demarcation for these phases would, strictly speaking, be the fall of Metz on October 27, 1870. The battle of Sedan, it is true, completely transformed the war to the extent that no regular French army was left in the field ; but it did not entirely deprive France of the possibility of achieving—if not ultimate victory—at any rate a drawn campaign. With the surrender of Metz, however, and the consequent freeing of 200,000 German troops under experienced leaders, the chances of French ultimate victory were really a minus quantity, and even the possibility of securing a favourable peace through the intervention of other Great Powers declined to vanishing point. After the collapse of the Empire the Republic, it is true, made gigantic efforts. In all, nearly a million and a half men were raised : arms and equipment were not lacking : the German armies were

vastly outnumbered; and the leadership of generals like Faidherbe and Chanzy contrasts more than favourably with that of the French commanders of the first phase of the war. Yet no permanent success rewarded these efforts. No victory of any real importance was won. No improvement in the conditions of peace was gained. The siege of Paris was not raised. And France had to accept defeat, complete and almost unredeemed.

When Gambetta invoked the memory of 1792 he was doubtless quite honest in his belief that history might repeat itself and that eloquence, energy, and self-sacrifice might yet bring France triumphant from the struggle. But between the conditions prevailing in 1792 and those of the autumn of 1870 a wide difference existed. In the former year it was five months before the Prussians came into contact with their enemy. France had declared war on April 20, but the Prussians did not enter French territory till July 30. Valmy was not fought until September 20, and in the interval between that date and the preceding April the French had time to recover from the discreditable encounters against Austria on the Flemish frontier, and *time*—the first requisite in army-making—was granted France. Again, without depreciating the efforts of the Republican levies, it is not unfair to say that it was to the old regular soldiers of the French army that, in the main, the victories of Dumouriez were due. A respectable fraction of the infantry and practically all the artillery and engineer services with their officers were from the old régime. In 1870, on the other hand, the French levies had but few trained officers, but a small stiffening of regular soldiers, and above all had no time. Whether in the north or on the Loire or in the south-east of France Moltke had one guiding rule—to deny the raw levies the time to grow into seasoned soldiers.

By concentrating the greater part of their efforts on the relief of Paris the French Government played into Moltke's hands, for not only was the offensive thus imposed on the French levies, but it was an offensive which had to be undertaken as quickly as possible if it was to be of any use at all. Without adequate training, however, this was beyond their



powers. The armies were raw, and it was Napoleon who had said, "With a raw army it is possible to carry a formidable position but not to carry out a plan." Had the French authorities left Paris to shift for itself and concentrated the whole of their efforts upon a united and co-ordinated offensive against the German communications, it is possible that more might have been achieved. Against the ill-directed blows aimed at it the head of the German army, as represented by the force round Paris, was never in any really serious danger; but the long artery which ran from Paris back over the German frontier was always more or less liable to be severed.

There has grown up a tendency to depreciate the military skill of Moltke as displayed in the winter of 1870-71. It is urged that he was grossly in error as to the power of resistance of France as a nation; that he seriously miscalculated the time that Paris could hold out; and that again and again he was in ignorance of the whereabouts and movements of some of the new French armies. And from these factors the conclusion is drawn that the Germans were often in a situation of grave peril: that large units escaped destruction by a hair's breadth only: that with difficulties and danger came dissension among the leaders; and that real anxiety was hardly absent for a day during the second period of the war. Considerable emphasis is laid upon the fact that at one time the raising of the siege of Paris was seriously considered.

That Moltke failed to give the proper credit to the patriotism and tenacity of France in general and Paris in particular is undoubtedly true; but, if his prescience was at fault, it must at any rate be conceded that after Sedan he was confronted with a situation almost without precedent, and one in which all normal calculations went by the board. In a campaign measured but by weeks, practically the whole of the regular army of one of the greatest military Powers of the world was killed, wounded, beleaguered, or in captivity, and such a stupendous triumph certainly seemed to warrant the belief that the war was virtually over. A great deal of capital has been made out of the fact that the victory of Sedan had not blinded Bismarck, Roon, Prince Frederick Charles, or King William—with his personal recollections of

1814—to the possibility that the French would not yield a speedy submission, and Moltke's march upon Paris is made to appear the action of an impetuous Achilles in defiance of the deliberations of these wiser Nestors. But that Moltke insisted on the immediate march upon the capital cannot be taken as a sign that he either overrated the victory of Sedan or underrated the further resisting power of the French nation. The march upon Paris, after the enemy field army had been defeated, had always formed an integral part of his plan of campaign; and so far from such an operation being equivalent to disregard for the recuperative power of France, it was designed mainly, by isolating Paris, to strangle any such fresh effort at its birth.

Even if the Germans had been forced to raise the siege of Paris the ultimate result of the war would not have been changed, and might, indeed, scarcely have been delayed. The Germans would have gained immensely in mobility and striking power, and the rude levies of France might have had shorter shrift than that actually, and of necessity, conceded them. And, further, Paris, freed from the grip of a besieging army, would have afforded France but little extra fighting power, for the troops it contained were largely untrained or without mobility. No change brought about by the raising of the siege of Paris could alter the fact that, if France were prepared to fight to the last man and the last shilling, Germany would not have shrunk from a similar sacrifice. In war *à outrance* the side which has a strong solid regular army has an overwhelming advantage over the side which has to rely upon untrained levies.

As regards the ignorance under which Moltke laboured at times as to the whereabouts and movements of the new French armies, such ignorance can scarcely be imputed to him as a fault. The whole essence of the second phase of the war—accepting the term here in its general significance of post-Sedan—was that it was an improvisation on the part of France, waged with improvised armies and directed by an improvised Government; and, for the invader, the essential difference between this and the first phase of the war was that there was no solid rock of pre-war intelligence on which to build an appreciation. Intelligence had now to be secured

*de novo* and laboriously pieced together before any appreciation could be made. The second phase was indeed a completely new war, which had to be undertaken by Moltke without delay the instant the first war had finished. When it is considered that, a month after the whole French regular army had ceased to exist, France had more men under arms than at the beginning of the war, and that units great and small grew up all over France literally in a night, Moltke's difficulty in holding on to Paris while at the same time beating down the rising armies in the provinces can be better understood. So far from deserving reproach for his inability at times to pierce the fog of war, brought about by an abnormal state of affairs, he really merits immense credit for the precision and force with which his blows were struck.

When time was of vital importance to France for organizing and training her new levies, it was a splendid gift of Fortune to Moltke that Metz should have surrendered less than two months after the battle of Sedan. Conversely, it may be argued that, in shutting himself up in the fortress and in thus immobilizing 200,000 German troops, Bazaine rendered a service to his country not less than by endeavouring to join MacMahon at Châlons. Even had he pressed on after the battle of Borny faster than he did, it is more than doubtful if he could have reached Verdun without a fight, especially when it is borne in mind that over thirty German squadrons were astride the Metz-Verdun road as early as August 15; and it is probable that Prince Frederick Charles would have forced him to turn at bay upon the Meuse. On the other hand, even if he had been forced to stand and fight upon the Meuse, MacMahon could have advanced to his assistance without being called upon to make a dangerous flank march. The numerous situations opened up by a combination of different moves by Bazaine and MacMahon offer extremely interesting problems for solution. Not the least interesting case to consider is the combination by which Bazaine would have held out for four, or at any rate three, months in Metz and MacMahon would have taken up a position at Orleans, while the organization of the new levies proceeded apace. Such a combination would have altered the whole general situation and would certainly have ruled



the immediate investment of Paris out of court. But it would not necessarily have found Moltke without a counter policy, although such is the inference to be drawn from the criticism of more than one writer on the war. A different combination of the pieces would merely have called for different play by the master. The street arab who besought Moltke "to make another good plan" would doubtless have had his confidence requited.

Before the war had actually ended, the seal was set upon Moltke's work as a maker of the nineteenth century. The unity of Germany, so long desired, became an accomplished fact, and on January 18, 1871, in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, King William assumed for himself and his descendants the title of German Emperor. Politically, the event was the culmination of the statecraft of the Chancellor Bismarck, but the subordination of the Southern German States to the hegemony of Prussia would probably not have been effected had not the military genius of Moltke revealed the security and protection to be won from closer union with her military might. Moltke himself had ever longed for such fusion and had realized that the leadership of Prussia was an essential feature of it. After his death there were found autograph drafts of speeches in which the subject is reviewed by him in a thorough and unmistakable manner. "Any real unity," he wrote, "which has hitherto been attained is due to the compulsion which Prussia, in gentler or rougher form, has exercised through her commercial policy, her diplomacy, or her sword," and he frankly faced and stated the fact that it could only be by a surrender of the military entities of the South German States to the war machine of Prussia that real union could be effected. Referring to the Defensive and Offensive Alliance which then existed, he remarked that such alliances were worth no more than the means which each side possessed for offensive or defensive action. "I am not referring to the fact that North Germany possesses the greater war strength; that is a matter of course. We maintain an army; you merely furnish contingents. We have a War Lord, you have a Commander-in-Chief. The difference is a great one, as the year 1866 proved. We offer you what we have purchased

with our blood, what no power shall again wrest from us ; we offer you what without us you can never achieve—a Fatherland.”

“ *Prussia by her prowess in war has made United Germany a possibility.*” Such was the conception underlying all Moltke’s ideas of the German future. Subordination to Prussia and, above all, the placing of State military resources at Prussia’s disposal were the practical means which he contemplated. The actual existing bonds between North and South he did not disregard, but he considered them but as means to an end. “ For fifty years German unity has been extolled in prose, in verse, in song, and in toasts. Rifle meetings have been held, and public speeches made, in honour of German unity. But still there has been no union. You want union, but you will not make use of the proffered means—Prussia.”

## CHAPTER XXXII

1871-1891—THE LAST YEARS

To few great captains has it been vouchsafed to receive twice in five years an ovation for victory over a great and powerful rival. On June 16, 1871, Moltke had his second triumph in Berlin when the formal entry of the victorious army took place. The conquering legions were represented by the Prussian Guards and units selected from all parts of Germany to the number of 42,000 strong ; and in perfect weather, and to the frantic acclamations of the citizens of Berlin, the pageant of the military might and the union of the Fatherland took place. Headed by eighty-one French eagles and colours, trophies of the war, the procession filed through the main avenues of the capital, and immediately preceding the German Emperor rode the trio, Moltke, Bismarck, and Roon. At their approach, all along the route, wreaths of laurel fell "in tropical showers." Throughout the march Moltke moved imperturbable as ever, suggesting to an eye-witness that even in the midst of his triumph he was methodically planning a battle rather than that he was conscious of an ovation for victory achieved. On the same day Moltke, who had been made a Count on the occasion of the fall of Metz, received the baton of a Field-Marshal, and carried it by the express order of the Emperor from the moment the troops began to march.

As a maker of his century Moltke's work was done ; but, although he had passed the span of three-score years and ten, yet another twenty years of useful life, and as the idol of his countrymen, remained to him. On his estate at Creisau at the age of sixty-eight he had planted trees, little realizing that he would one day as an old man sit in their



shade. From the end of the Franco-German War until his death the Field-Marshal passed the summer months at Creisau, living the life of a country gentleman of simple tastes and devoted to the development of his estate. After the death of his sister Frau von Burt, his nephew, Major Helmuth von Moltke with his wife and four children, made up the household. Moltke's wants were few; the rooms he occupied were Spartan in their simplicity; and a simplicity, carried almost to extremes, marked his whole life. He never possessed more than two suits, and on a short visit to a friend or neighbour he never took luggage. When evening-dress was likely to be required he would travel in his dress-coat and go about in it for days together. Abstemiousness marked his life, and hunger and thirst were sensations he hardly knew. "I was so often hungry in my youth that I became accustomed to it and do not notice it now," he used to say. The only luxury he allowed himself was the laying out of a park, on which he laboured hard in person as regards the surveying work in which he was a master. Not a day passed without a visit to the chapel where his dead wife lay.

His recreations were reading, listening to music, and sketching. His favourite books were history and philosophy; next to learned works he liked sound humour, and Dickens was an especial favourite. But his favourite occupation was, probably, sketching. He was a many-sided artist, and in addition to landscapes drew portraits of several of his acquaintances. Some water-colours and oils of his younger days which are still preserved attest his mastery over colouring. Even at the age of eighty-three, during a journey to Italy, he made a sketch of the rocky promontory of Monaco which displays his characteristic neatness and firmness of touch.

The life at Creisau was, however, but the relaxation from the duties of Chief of the Staff, a post which Moltke continued to hold almost till his death. The real head of the Prussian army, surrounded by colleagues trained by his hand and directing younger men to follow in their steps, he went steadily on in the incessant work of military organization. The lessons of the last war were carefully learned, and the Official Account was prepared under Moltke's auspices

and in some parts written by his pen. He visited Russia and Italy in the suite of the Emperor, and almost every year accompanied his sovereign to the autumn manœuvres of one or other corps or group of corps. In 1879, on completing sixty years' service, he received the congratulations and thanks of the Emperor as well as the cross with star of the Order *Pour le Mérite*. Two years later, on the occasion of the conferring of decorations upon several Staff officers who had done good work upon the Official History of the War of 1870-71, the Emperor in a Cabinet Order eulogized Moltke for "the possession of two merits rarely united in the same person—eminent services in the successful direction of war itself, and in the worthy historical representation of the same."

Moltke was now over eighty years of age. Although his mental powers were unclouded, he felt that the time had come to make way for a younger Chief of the Staff, and accordingly tendered his resignation. This drew from the Emperor a Cabinet Order to the effect that Moltke's services were so valuable to the army that his resignation could never be accepted—surely one of the most striking testimonials ever received by a soldier. For seven more years, therefore, he continued to hold the chief military office of his country, but at length, at the patriarchal age of eighty-eight, he felt constrained to write to the young Emperor William II. to say that, unable in his old age to mount a horse, he asked as a favour that his Majesty should graciously allow him to retire. In an affectionate letter his sovereign acceded to the old Field-Marshal's request, appointing him, however, at the same time President of the Committee for National Defence. In a Cabinet Order of the Day the Emperor expressed his sincere conviction that Moltke's tenure of the office of Chief of the Staff would be honourably remembered "so long as there was a Prussian soldier or a Prussian heart left in the world."

Although the multifarious work of the Staff had remained the chief preoccupation of Moltke he found ample scope for his energy and devotion in public affairs. In 1867, though defeated in Berlin, he had been elected to the Reichstag for three other constituencies and represented one

uninterruptedly until his death. From the year 1881 he regularly opened the parliamentary sessions in the capacity of doyen, and already, nine years earlier, the confidence reposed in him by his Imperial master had led to his being given a seat in the Prussian Upper House. The same unwearied devotion which marked all his acts was revealed in his political life. Although he spoke but seldom, no representative was more conscientious than Moltke in his attendance at the Reichstag. His speeches were short, but the absence of length was richly compensated for by the mastery of the subject revealed by them, and no member was listened to with a profounder attention than the old Field-Marshal.

In the main he confined his participation in debate to questions of a military nature or to those political questions which were inevitably allied to them. The utterances of most interest are those which he delivered in the Reichstag between 1874 and 1880 on the occasion of the debates on bills dealing with the additions to, and changes in, the Imperial Military Law of 1874. By that date the military situation in Europe had undergone a change almost incredible to those who had witnessed the years of Sedan and Versailles. France, rising as it were from the dust, had shown a marvellous resurrection. As Prussia had learned from France after Jena, so France learned from Prussia after Sedan. A new military law passed in 1872 reorganized the army of France on the model of that of her conqueror. The principle of universal military service was then introduced and all French citizens were obliged at the age of twenty to serve in various active and reserve formations up to the age of forty. The law was readily accepted by the people, and had been the prelude to a military revival which had greatly alarmed Bismarck. During the winter of 1874-75 Moltke was brought from his silence in the War Office to explain in the Reichstag the serious danger in which Germany stood. And Moltke explained with an emphatic brevity "that sent a shiver down every patriotic German spine."

Bismarck, indeed, took the matter seriously enough, and apparently made up his mind that it was to Germany's advantage to throw down the gauntlet without delay.



On April 10, 1875, Lord Odo Russell was writing to Lord Derby "Bismarck is at his old tricks again, alarming the Germans through the Press and intimating that the French are going to attack them." A few days later the *Berlin Post* came out with an inspired article, "Is War in Sight?" which caused the utmost excitement throughout Europe and produced a tension rivalled only by that of the Hohenzollern candidature of five years earlier. On the last day of the month the Belgian Minister at Berlin took occasion to sound Moltke on the subject, and was startled to receive the Field-Marshal's reply: "Much as I hate war, I do not see how Germany can avoid it *next year* unless the Great Powers coalesce to persuade France to reduce her armaments to a reasonable peace establishment." England and Russia, however, were indignant at Bismarck's evident desire to fasten a quarrel upon France. On May 10 the Emperor Alexander and Gortschakoff arrived at Berlin; Russia's attitude was clearly defined: and within forty-eight hours Gortschakoff was able to send a telegram to St. Petersburg: *La paix est assurée*. For a time the possibility of a new Franco-German War was forgotten, but again, in April 1877, Moltke laid emphasis on the gigantic task which France had accomplished in carrying out in such a short period of time "the reorganization of her army with great knowledge and rare energy"; and he warned his hearers that "in France the army is the spoilt child of the nation—its pride and its hope; in France the army has long since been forgiven for its defeats."

Of special interest is the consideration of the evolution after 1871 of the German strategic plan for dealing with a future European War, and of the development of the ideas of Moltke and his successors on the subject. Immediately after the Franco-German War Moltke considered that, in the event of a hostile combination of France and Russia, Germany could unhesitatingly accept the challenge and retort with an offensive on both fronts. Within an unexpectedly brief period, however, the recuperation of France ruled such a possibility out of court. Germany could no longer count upon being able to aim her blows right and left, and a decision had to be arrived at as to which front should

witness a German offensive, and which should be marked by a holding or defensive policy.

Moltke's first plan was to take the offensive against France while maintaining a defensive attitude against Russia. He was led to adopt this solution in view of the fact that the French strategic deployment could be effected more rapidly than that of Russia, and that by the twelfth day of mobilization the French main army could be in position on the frontier. With a German offensive directed against France, a great *Entscheidungsschlacht* could therefore be expected to occur in the third week of hostilities. In the event of a successful issue to this battle there are grounds for believing that Moltke proposed to renounce the advance upon Paris, and to leave the further issue in the west mainly in the hands of the diplomatists, so as to have the opportunity of throwing as much weight as possible upon the eastern front. It was considered by Moltke that not before the fourth week could the Russians be ready on the Vistula.

The recollection of the post-Sedan campaign was probably not without effect in inducing Moltke to avoid as far as possible a long-drawn-out campaign with France, but the proposal to shut down military operations and to leave the issue largely to diplomacy has been severely criticized. It is true that German diplomacy was then synonymous with Bismarck, in whom Moltke had considerable confidence; nevertheless, a nation like France, capable of the efforts and self-sacrifice after Sedan, would hardly be likely to submit to anything but irretrievable defeat. The question of the relative value of arms or statecraft soon, however, became merely academic, for the alliance with Austria in 1879 altered the situation, and to the advantage of Germany, in the east. It led to a reversal of Moltke's strategic plan, and in 1880 he laid down that the offensive should be made against Russia, while a defensive policy should be observed as regards France.

This reversal of Moltke's strategy was due to the accession of strength afforded in the east by Austria, and to the growing difficulty of securing an early decision against France in the west. The reorganization of the French army, the improvements effected in the defences of Paris, and the

strengthening of the fortresses and advanced forts opposite the German frontier, all pointed to a slowing down of a German onrush. In these circumstances Moltke was inclined to believe that it would be better to rely upon the great German frontier fortresses, and even the line of the Rhine, as a barrier against France, and to proceed with the maximum of strength against Russia in the east, where the great superiority of the German strategic railway system, compared with that of Russia, would afford a great advantage. Moltke remained a convert to this plan even after the admission of Italy into the Triple Alliance, and his successor as Chief of the Staff, Count Waldersee, was of the same mind.

In 1891 Count Waldersee was succeeded by Count Schlieffen as Chief of the Staff, and before long another reversal of the strategic plan of Germany took place. Hitherto, so far as Germany and France were concerned, it had been assumed that the choice of the offensive or defensive in the west had lain with the former Power, but the continued recuperation of France completely changed the situation. With the growing offensive power of France it was probable that she would take energetic steps to reconquer her lost provinces, and so far from Germany being free to maintain a passive, if temporary, defensive in the west, she might easily find herself involved in the task of endeavouring to stem an overwhelming onrush. In these circumstances, Count Schlieffen reverted to the earlier solution of seeking a rapid decision in the west and of confining the German effort, for the moment, to a defensive in the east.

To carry out this project wholeheartedly it was necessary to concentrate the maximum force for the attack against France, while leaving merely an irreducible minimum in the east; while, in view of the strength of the French fortified front, and of the constricted space between the Luxemburg and Swiss frontiers, it was considered that success could only be achieved by violating the neutrality of Belgium and by a march through that country. The sequel to the adoption of this scheme is now a matter of history, and so far as Moltke is concerned it is only necessary to say that such a solution was never countenanced by him. On more than one



occasion he had expressly laid down that violation of Belgian neutrality would lead to the intervention of England.

Of Moltke's voluminous writings, a letter of 1880 upon the laws of war is worth quoting. It was an acknowledgment of a manual compiled at Oxford by the self-elected "Institut de Droit International."

"Perpetual peace," wrote Moltke, "is a dream, and it is not even a beautiful dream. War is an element in the order of the world ordained by God. In it the noblest virtues of mankind are developed; courage and the abnegation of self, faithfulness to duty, and the spirit of sacrifice; the soldier gives his life. Without war the world would stagnate and lose itself in materialism."

For the views thus expressed Moltke was somewhat roughly handled by the Radical Press of Germany, but the letter drew from a fellow-soldier in England <sup>1</sup> the remark that "it should be learnt by all those excellent philanthropists who believe the day is nigh at hand when the hungry lion will contentedly lie down beside the fat and helpless lamb."

In October 1890 Moltke completed his ninetieth year, and the occasion was marked by a great festival throughout the length and breadth of the Empire. The chief centre of homage was Berlin, and Moltke, from a place of honour in the buildings of the General Staff, witnessed procession after procession of enthusiastic crowds, and received greetings from guilds, bodies of students and men of letters and art. A triumphal car, on which were seated Victory with a golden palm, Strategy carrying in her right hand a sword and in her left a book, and Art chiselling a bust of Moltke, testified to the military victories won by the idol of the populace. A great banquet took place in the evening, when the veteran was thanked by the Emperor and received a special Field-Marshal's baton as a personal memento from his Sovereign. The Emperor, indeed, deplored that no honour was left with which he could express his undying personal gratitude, but asked Moltke to accept as an act of homage the "colours of my Guards that have so often been borne into action under your command."

The scene was the splendid sunset of a long and brilliant career. The night was at hand, and on April 24, 1891,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Wolseley.

Moltke was attacked by a sudden weakness while engaged in his favourite pastime of whist at his house in Berlin. Without a struggle and without suffering he passed away, his last conscious act being to turn his face towards the wall where Marie von Moltke's portrait hung. His countrymen gave him an imposing and solemn funeral in Berlin ; and then they laid him to rest in the little chapel at Creisau, beside the wife whom he had so tenderly loved, and whose image, since her death, had never been absent from his heart.





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

SINCE this volume, apart from the actual story of Moltke's life, deals generally with the history of Prussia for the greater part of a century, and in more detail with two great wars, it is almost unnecessary to say that the bibliography given below is in no sense whatever complete. A complete bibliography would require a large volume in itself; and it may be mentioned that the number of extant publications dealing with the Franco-German War alone exceeds twelve thousand. The list now given contains merely the names of volumes which have been found of assistance in this work on Moltke as a Maker of the Nineteenth Century, and are recommended for the student who wishes to explore for himself some particular portion of the area covered.

Where the title of a book by a foreign author is given in English, it is to be understood that an English translation exists; and in the case of works by military writers the rank given is that held by the particular author at the time the work referred to was published.

For almost the whole period covered by this volume the *Cambridge Modern History* is of the highest value. The earliest period specifically mentioned in the text is the era of Frederick the Great, and for this Comte de Mirabeau's *De la monarchie prussienne sous Frédéric le Grand* (1788) and Norwood Young's *The Life of Frederick the Great* (1917) have been consulted. For Prussian history dating from the French Revolutionary period a sound framework can be made from material found in C. A. Fyffe's *History of Modern Europe* (1892), and this framework can be filled in from the various volumes of Alison's *History of Europe* (1833, etc.). *The Life and Times of Stein*, by J. R. Seeley (1878), is absolutely indispensable, and for a concise narrative of Prussian history *The Evolution of Prussia* (1915), by J. A. R. Marriott and C. G. Robertson, can hardly be bettered. For the earlier portion of the period treated of in this volume, use has also been made of F. Loraine Petre's *Napoleon's Conquest of Prussia* (1907); *The Revolutionary Period in Europe, 1763-1815*, by H. E. Bourne (1915); *The Partitions of Poland*, by Lord Eversley (1916); and H. A. L. Fisher's *Studies in Napoleonic Statesmanship: Germany* (1903). Other works on German history generally are *Germany, 1815-71*, by Sir A. W. Ward (1917), a work of the very highest class, one volume of which

contains a masterly survey of the War of 1866; E. Denis, *La Fondation de l'empire allemand, 1862-71* (1906); Bismarck's *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*; *Bismarck*, by G. Locan Gazet (1919); and *Bismarck*, by C. Grant Robertson (1918), a volume in this series. The last-named is a mine of information.

As regards the more military aspect of the period marked by the collapse and regeneration of Prussia, the following are recommended: *A History of Germany, 1715-1815*, by C. T. Atkinson (1908); this is almost entirely military. *Scharnhorst*, by Max Lehmann (1867); von der Goltz's *Von Rossbach bis Jena und Auerstadt*, and *The Nation in Arms* (1890); *Das königliche preussische Kriegsministerium, 1809-1909*, published by the German War Office in 1909. This book, however, is of much less value than the title would lead the reader to expect. A far better work is Freytag Loringhoven's *A Nation trained in Arms or a Militia?* (1917). Also of interest are: *Aus meinem Leben*, by von Müffling (1851); *The Jena Campaign*, by Colonel F. N. Maude (1909); *How Wars were won*, by G. T. Warner (1915); *Der Krieg von 1806 und 1807*, by von Lettow-Vorbeck (1892-99). The influence exerted by King William I. can be traced in *Militärische Schriften weiland Kaiser Wilhelms des Grossen Majestät* (1897); Schneider's *L'Empereur Guillaume, souvenirs intimes* (French translation) (1888); and *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse und sein Kriegsminister Roon als Bildner des preussisch-deutschen Heeres* (1907), by von Blume. A rare and interesting little book is *A Sketch of the Military and Political History of Prussia*, by Captain W. Flood (1832). Roon's own *Denkwürdigkeiten* (1892) is invaluable. But the best book dealing with this period in the life of Prussia is *La Régénération de la Prusse après Iéna*, by Captain Vidal de la Blache (1910). It is absolutely invaluable both for the material and for the voluminous references to authorities quoted. There is a very useful summary of the Danish War in 1848, entitled "A Forgotten War," in *War and Policy*, by Professor Spenser Wilkinson.

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*stab*, Firckhs (1887); *Moltke*, by von der Goltz in the series *Vorkämpfer des Jahrhunderts* (1903); and *Moltke in der Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Operationen*, published by the German General Staff in 1905. French military literature is not widely represented as regards biographies of Moltke, but there is a sketch *M. de Moltke*, by Charles Malo (1891), and an anonymous work published in Paris in 1888 entitled *Le Maréchal de Moltke*. More technical in scope are *Le Plan de combat : Étude de stratégie*, by General Lewal (1901); *Le Maréchal de Moltke : organisateur et stratège*, by the same author (1891); and Lieut.-Colonel Rousset's *Les Maîtres de la guerre, Frédéric II, Napoléon, Moltke, Essai critique d'après des travaux inédits de M. le général Bonnal* (1899). The works by Generals Foch and Palat dealing with Moltke's strategy in 1870 are referred to later. French and German military reviews yield a rich harvest on various aspects of Moltke's military career, particularly the numbers which appeared shortly after his death. A lengthy Italian work by Colonel Zanello, *Moltke* (1895), should be mentioned.

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The works coming under heading (c) include the *Letters to His Wife*; *Letters to his Mother and Brothers*; *The Russo-Turkish War in European Turkey, 1828 and 1829* (1849); *Letters from Turkey, 1835-39*; *Essays, Speeches, and Memoirs*—the memoirs (of, but not by, Moltke) are not very valuable; *Observations on the Influence of Arms of Precision on Modern Tactics* (1865); and *Letters from Russia* (1856).

For the War of 1866 the portion of Moltke's *Militärische Korre-*



*spondenz* dealing with that campaign forms the best first-hand evidence. Next in importance come the Prussian and Austrian *Official Accounts*, the latter of which has been translated into French with the title, *Les Luites d'Autriche*. General Bonnal's *Sadowa* (1900) is a very fine study, and it has been admirably translated into English by C. F. Atkinson. Von Sybel's *Foundation of the German Empire* (1889) contains a mass of information necessarily excluded from smaller works. Other useful works are Colonel Glünice's *Campaign in Bohemia, 1866* (1907); *The Seven Weeks' War*, by Colonel Sir H. M. Hozier, an eye-witness (1867); *The Overthrow of the Germanic Confederation by Prussia in 1866*, by Sir A. Malet (1870); and Colonel Malleison's *The Refounding of the German Empire, 1848-71* (1893). *Vers Sadowa, étude stratégique*, by J. Duval (1907), is particularly interesting but rather violently anti-Moltke. A concise history of the campaign, *Bohemia, 1866*, by Lieut.-Colonel Malcolm, is an admirable critical survey and a model of what a campaign text-book should be.

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Of English authors who have written on or dealt with the war the following works have been consulted: *Strategy of the Franco-German War up to Sedan*, by Major W. D. Bird (1909); *The Campaign of Sedan*, by G. Hooper (1887); *The Science of War*, by Colonel G. F. R. Henderson (1905); Hamley's *Operations of War* (1889); *The Campaign in Alsace*, by Brigadier-General J. P. Du Cane (1912); and *Saarbrück to Paris, 1870*, by Lieut.-Colonel Sisson Pratt (1904).

Of personal recollections compiled by those who, by virtue of their office, were behind the scenes the volumes which follow are of outstanding interest, namely—*With the Royal Headquarters*, by von Verdy du Vernois (1897), a narrative of exceptional value; *The Franco-German War by Generals and other Officers who have taken Part in it* (1906); *Journal of a Staff Officer*, by Comte d'Hérisson (1871); *Sedan*, by General de Wimpffen (1871), and *Froeschweiler, Sedan et la Commune* (1910), by General d'Orcet; *Des causes qui*

ont amené les désastres de l'armée française dans la campagne de 1870 (published in Brussels, 1871, and attributed to Napoleon III.); the *Personal Memoirs* of General P. H. Sheridan, U.S. Army (1888); and *Bismarck in the Franco-German War*, by M. Busch (1879). Dr. Busch was a regular Boswell to the Dr. Johnson of the Chancellor, and his book contains many references also to Moltke.

Other works which have been found of use include *Fifty Years of Europe, 1870-1919*, by C. D. Hazen (1919); *L'Histoire du 5<sup>e</sup> corps d'armée, 1870*, published by the Historical Section of the French General Staff, and valuable for Woerth; *Les Grandes Batailles d'histoire* (1913) and *Les Transformations de la guerre* (1916), by J. Colin; *La Guerre moderne* (1890), by General Derré-cagaix; *Essai sur la doctrine stratégique allemande* (1914), which should be read with von Schlieffen's *Cannae*; *Le Secret de la frontière, 1815-1871-1914* (1918), by F. Engerand; *Kaiser Friedrichs Tagebuch mit Einleitung und Aktenstücken* (1919), Edward Engel; *The Rise of Rail Power in War and Conquest*, by E. A. Pratt (1915)—a very valuable work; *La Légende de Moltke*, a translation of a German work by Karl Bleibtreu. Though often quoted by French writers, the book is almost unknown in England. Very iconoclastic, it is, however, not without interest. *The War for the Rhine Frontier*, by Colonel W. von Rüstow (1870); *Operations of the 1st Army*, by Major A. von Schell (1873); *Die Lage am 15. August 1870 Abends* (1914), by von Witting; *The Third French Republic* (1909), by F. Lawton; *The French Campaign of 1870-71*, by A. Niemann (1872)—the maps are particularly good; *The People's War in France, 1870-71*, by Colonel Lonsdale Hale (1904); *Gambetta*, by Paul Deschanel (1920); *Francis Joseph I., His Life and Times*, by R. P. Mahaffy (1908); *Lord Lyons*, by Lord Newton (1913); and *Der Deutsche Generalstab in der Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Krieges*, by General von Kuhl (1920). Finally Zola's *La Débâcle* must not be overlooked.



## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1800. Moltke born, October 26.
- 1806. Battle of Jena.
- 1807. Treaty of Tilsit.
- 1811. Moltke enters Danish Military Academy.
- 1813. The War of Liberation. Battle of Leipzig.
- 1815. Congress of Vienna.
- 1819-22. Moltke's service in Danish Army.
- 1822. Enters Prussian Army, March 12.
- 1823-26. At Staff College.
- 1832. Appointed to Great General Staff.  
Publication of Clausewitz's *On War*.
- 1835. Moltke promoted Captain, March 30.
- 1835-39. Service in Turkey and Asia Minor.
- 1839. Returns to Great General Staff.
- 1840. Appointed to General Staff IVth Army Corps.
- 1842. Marriage of Moltke. Promotion to Major.
- 1845-46. A.D.C. to Prince Henry of Prussia, at Rome.
- 1848. The Year of Revolution.  
Moltke appointed Chief of Staff of IVth Army Corps.  
War between Prussia and Denmark.
- 1849. The Imperial Crown refused by the King of Prussia.
- 1850. Convention of Olmütz.  
Moltke promoted Lieutenant-Colonel.
- 1851. Promotion to Colonel.
- 1852. Louis Napoleon proclaimed Emperor of the French.
- 1854-56. The Crimean War.
- 1855-56. Moltke visits England, France, and Russia.
- 1856. Moltke promoted Major-General.  
The Treaty of Paris.
- 1858. Moltke appointed Chief of the Staff of the Army.
- 1859. Italian War—War between France (with Piedmont) and Austria.  
Roon becomes Minister of War.  
Beginning of Scheme of Army Reform.  
Moltke promoted Lieutenant-General.
- 1860. Garibaldi's Expedition of "The Thousand."
- 1861. The Prince Regent becomes King of Prussia as William I.  
American Civil War begins.
- 1862. Rejection of the Military Budget.

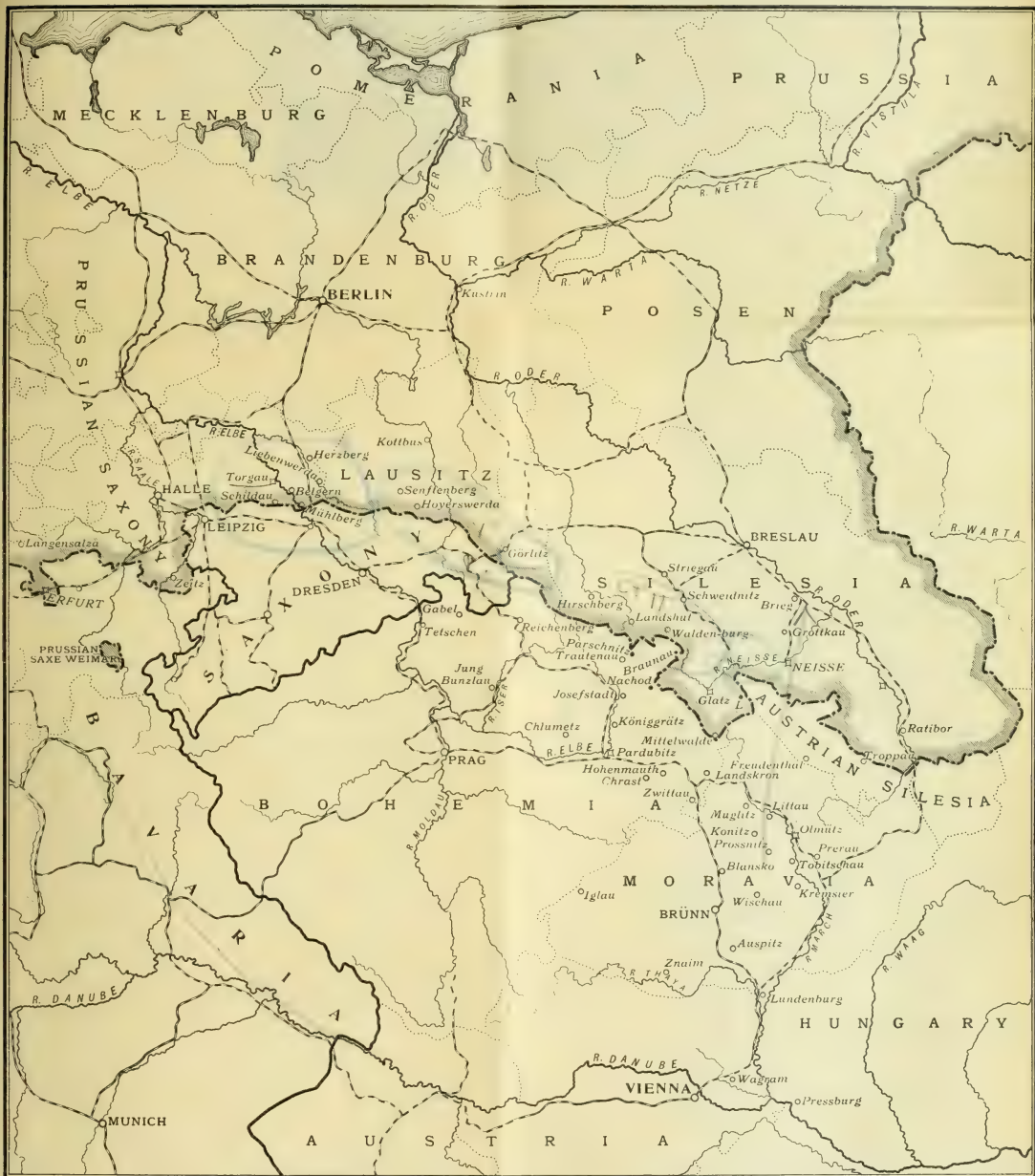
- 1862. Bismarck becomes Minister-President of Prussia.  
Bismarck's " blood and iron " speech (Sept. 29).
- 1864. Alliance of Prussia and Austria.  
War with Denmark.  
Treaty of Vienna. The Duchies ceded to Austria and Prussia.
- 1865. Convention of Gastein.
- 1866. Moltke promoted General of Infantry.  
Austria and Prussia (in alliance with Italy) at war (June 15).  
Battle of Custoza (June 24).  
Battle of Königgrätz (July 3).  
Treaty of Prague (Aug. 23).
- 1867. Moltke at Paris.
- 1868. Death of Moltke's wife.
- 1870. The Hohenzollern candidature.  
Benedetti at Ems (July 13).  
France declares war on Prussia (July 14).  
French cross the frontier at Saarbrücken (Aug. 2).  
French defeated at Weissenburg (Aug. 4).  
French defeated at Spicheren (Aug. 6).  
French defeated at Woerth (Aug. 6).  
Indecisive battle at Borny (Aug. 14).  
French defeated at Mars-la-Tour (Aug. 16).  
French defeated at Gravelotte (Aug. 18).  
Metz invested (Aug. 19).  
MacMahon begins his march from Châlons to Metz (Aug. 23).  
French defeated at Beaumont (Aug. 30).  
French defeated and surrender at Sedan (Sept. 1-2).  
Fall of the Empire (Sept. 4).  
Paris invested by Germans (Sept. 19).  
Fall of Strasburg (Sept. 28).  
Germans take Orleans (Oct. 12).  
Capitulation of Metz (Oct. 27).  
Moltke receives title of Count (Oct. 28).  
Germans defeated at Coulmiers and driven from Orleans (Nov. 9).  
French defeated at Amiens (Nov. 27).  
Germans retake Orleans (Dec. 5).  
Germans occupy Rouen (Dec. 6).
- 1871. Indecisive battle at Bapaume (Jan. 3).  
French defeated at Le Mans (Jan. 12).  
Proclamation of German Empire (Jan. 18).  
French defeated at St. Quentin (Jan. 19).  
Capitulation of Paris (Jan. 28).  
Bourbaki driven into Switzerland (Feb. 1).  
Garrison of Belfort marches out with the honours of war (Feb. 5).

- 1871. Germans enter Paris (March 1).  
Treaty of Frankfort (May 10).  
Moltke promoted General Field-Marshal (June 16).
- 1875. Franco-German Crisis.
- 1877-78. Russo-Turkish War.
- 1879. The Dual Alliance (Germany and Austria).
- 1881. Moltke's resignation refused.
- 1882. The Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, Italy).
- 1887. Moltke in attendance on the King during manœuvres, for  
the last time.
- 1888. Moltke released from his post as Chief of the Staff.  
Death of Emperors William I. and Frederick III.  
Accession of Emperor William II.
- 1890. Bismarck "resigns."
- 1891. Death of Moltke, April 24.





# GENERAL MAP 1866.

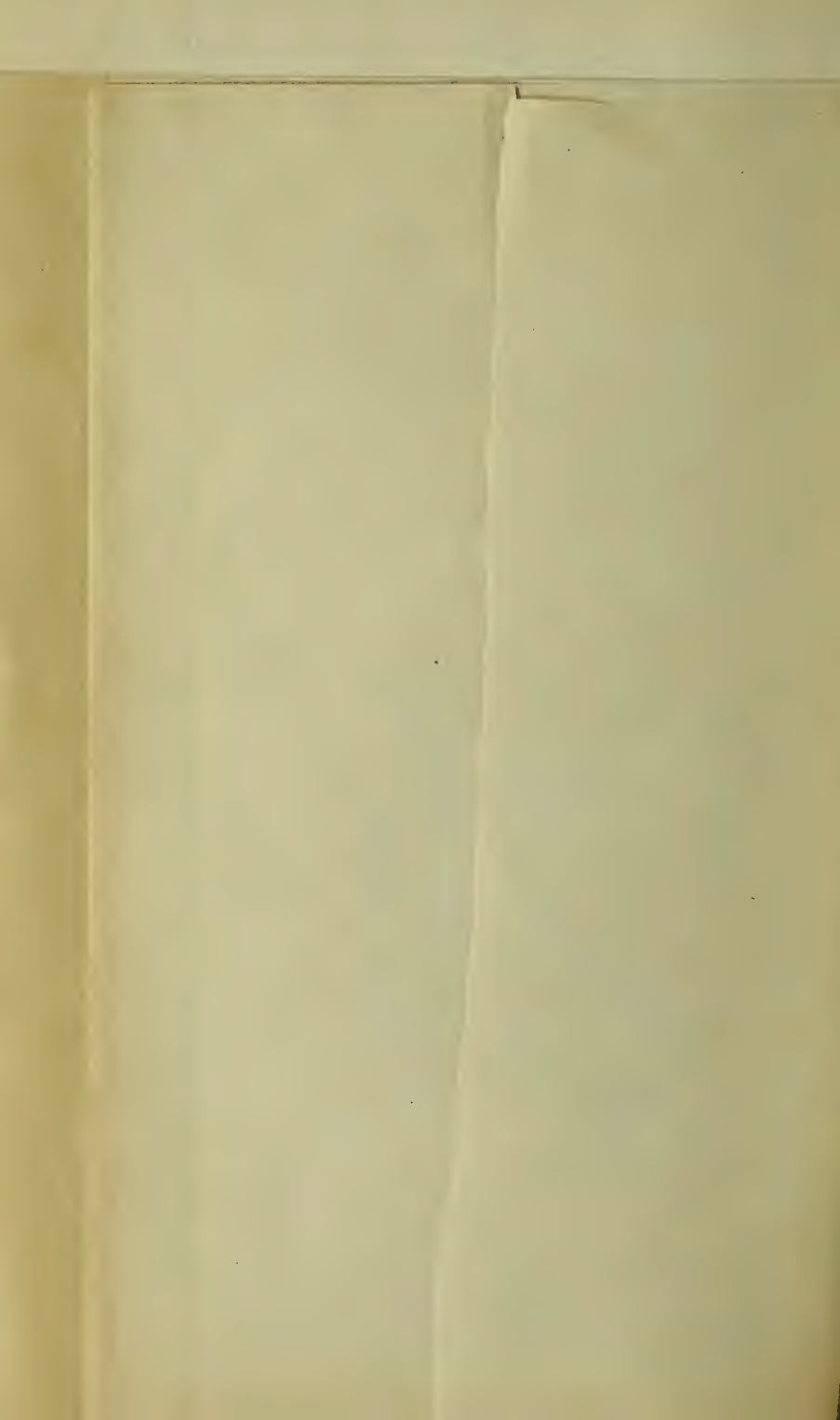


PRUSSIAN FRONTIER

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SAXON & BAVARIAN FRONTIERS

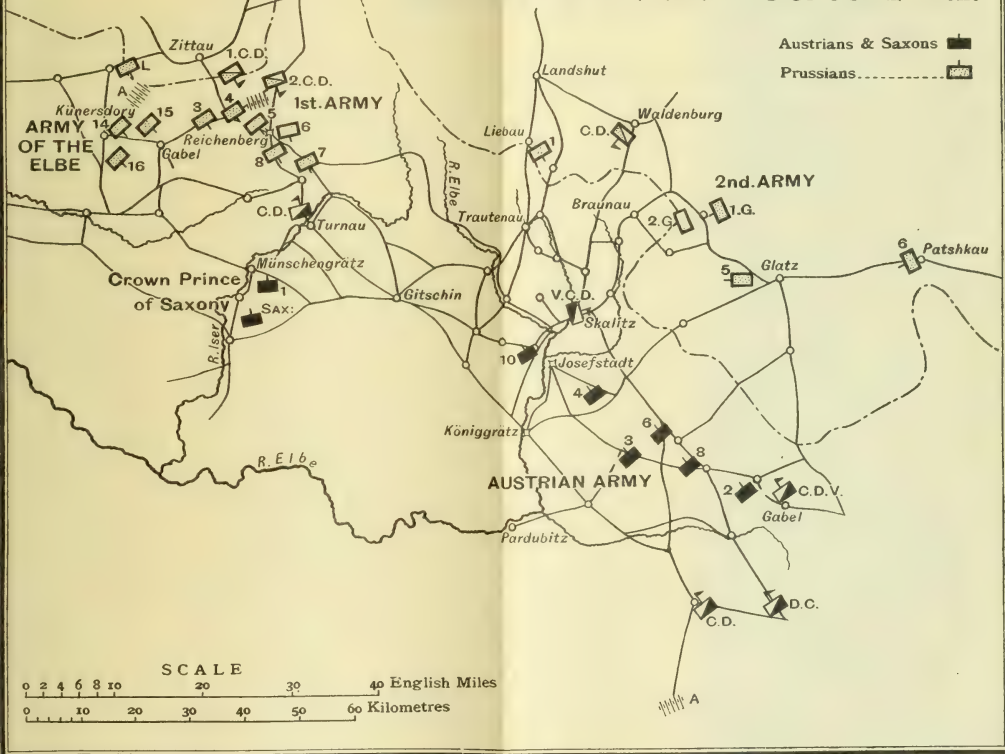








# POSITIONS ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 25th.





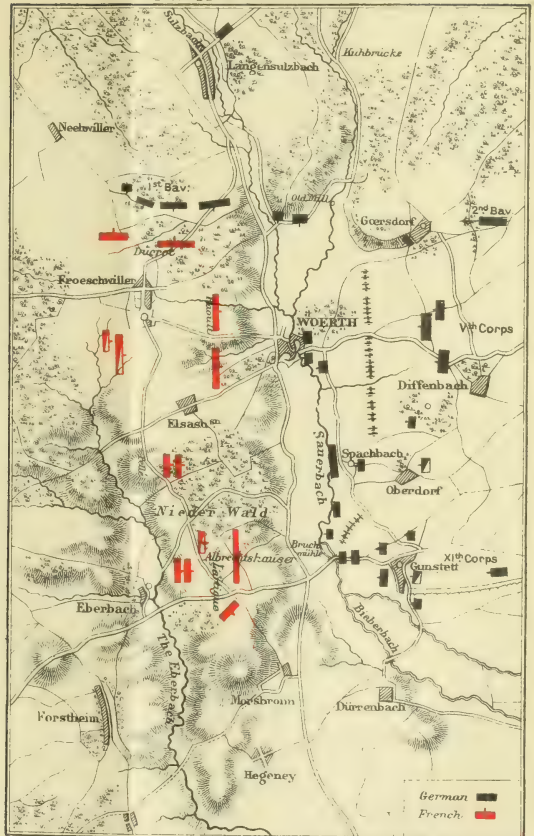








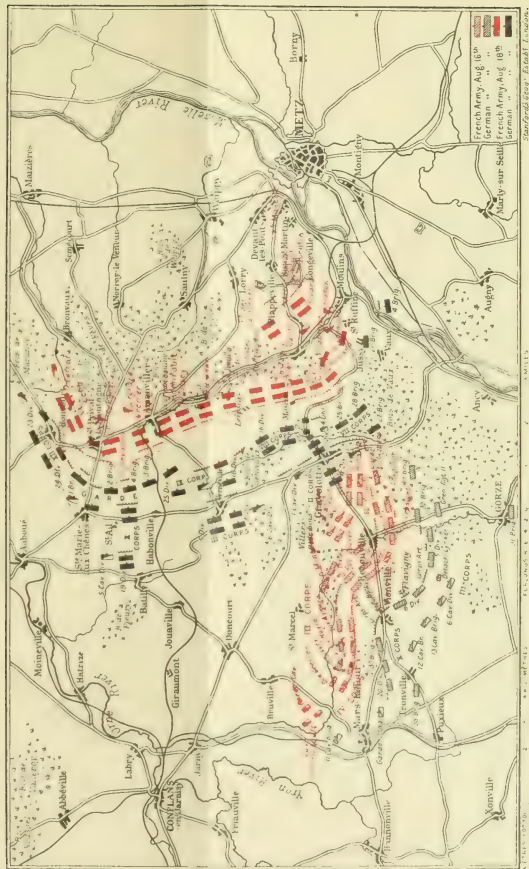
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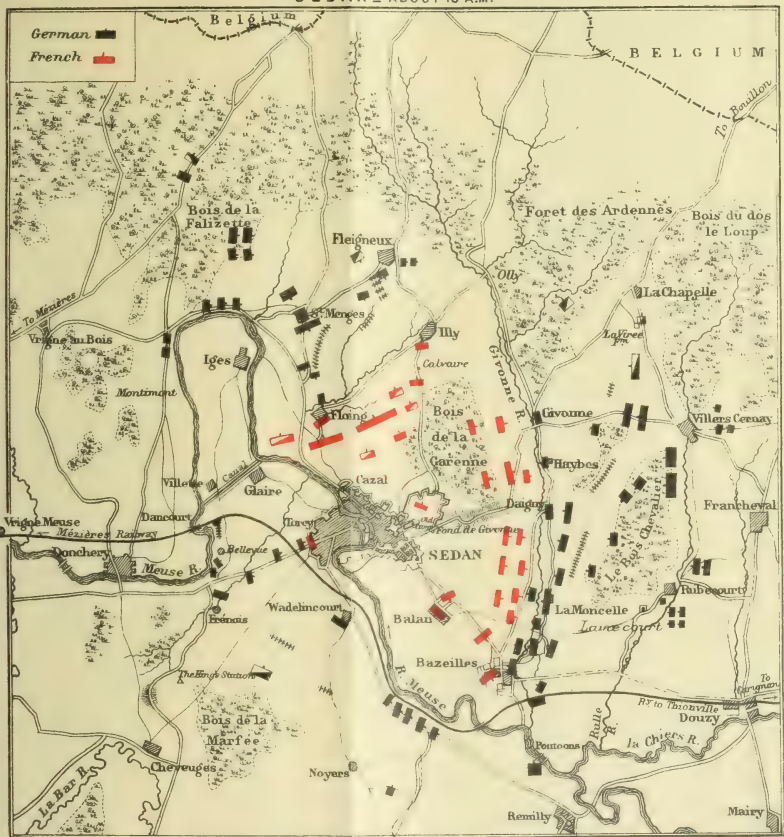


PLAN OF THE BATTLES OF REZONVILLE AND GRAVELLOTTE.





# SEDAN — ABOUT 10 A.M.



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